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Hidden in plain sight: An examination of entertainment-education

Kendra M. McClure
Eastern Illinois University

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Hidden in Plain Sight: An Examination of Entertainment-Education

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BY

Kendra M. McClure

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Abstract

Entertainment-Education is the process of weaving social messages into programming intended to entertain. The term was coined several decades ago, and the strategy has been widely used in mediated programs in the United States and abroad, particularly in developing countries. This thesis critiques the practice from a critical/culture perspective and particularly highlights issues that stem from political economy of media, agency, and critical pedagogy. To accomplish this, the volume is broken down into four sections: a survey of E-E and an explanation of its theoretical framework, an examination of *Get Schooled*, an initiative that fits the profile of an E-E intervention, an ideological critique of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Law & Order: SVU*, two primetime dramas that have been used for E-E interventions, and a discussion of the practice's future. At its best, Entertainment-Education, as it is being used in the contexts I have outlined here, is a bandage over problems that stem from larger cultural concerns. At its worst, it is a manipulative tool that has the potential to worsen the situations producers claim they want to remedy. If it continues to be used to communicate public information, I recommend that producers be much more mindful of their partnerships, their perpetuation of neoliberal ideology, and their intended and unintended impacts on global culture.

To Eleni, who inspires me to write books

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Introduction

In April 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a partnership with Viacom in which it paid an undisclosed sum of money to "weave education-theme story lines into existing shows or to create new shows centered on education" (Arango & Stelter, 2009, para 6). Prior to this announcement, it was reported that Gates paid NBC an undisclosed sum to "develop the script for a recent episode of *ER*" (Arango & Stelter, 2009, para. 2) and also contributed to shows including NBC's *Law & Order: SVU* and ABC's *Private Practice* (Arango & Stelter, 2009).

The Gates Foundation is not the only organization engaging in this practice. Respected institutions such as The Norman Lear Center, a division of the Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Southern California, The Kaiser Family Foundation, Johns Hopkins University, Ohio University, the University of New Mexico, Regent University, the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, and the University of Natal in South Africa have dedicated much time, effort, and funding to developing what they believe to be a powerful pedagogical tool that has the potential to produce social change. This tool has been dubbed Entertainment-Education (E-E).

By definition, E-E is "the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior" (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Though the founders stress that it is not a theory but a strategy (Singhal & Rogers, 2004), they claim E-E is rooted in theory, specifically Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), MacLean's theory of

the triune brain (1973), Bentley's dramatic theory (1967), and Jung's theory of archetypes (1938; 1968).

The majority of E-E "interventions" (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 5) occur in developing areas such as India (Sood & Nambiar, 2006; Sood, Shefner-Rogers, & Sengupta, 2006), Bangledesh (Do & Kincaid, 2006), Mexico (Singhal & Rogers, 2004), Latin America (PCI-Media Impact, 2009a), and several countries in Africa (Tagoe & Aggor, 2009; Lapinski & Nwulu, 2008; Pappas-DeLuca et. al., 2008; Smith, Downs, & Witte, 2007). Efforts in those areas have largely centered on population control (through the communication of family planning techniques) and HIV/AIDS prevention. The practice is also prominent in the United States, however, and has been advanced in recent years by several organizations, primarily those listed above.

Proponents of E-E say this is a promising method of educating the public about social issues (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Singhal & Rogers, 2004; Sabido, 2004; Poindexter, 2004), and, as mentioned above, respected organizations have allocated funding toward its development. The Norman Lear Center, for example, recently partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes for Health's National Cancer Institute to create Hollywood, Health, & Society, an organization that provides accurate health-related content to script writers (The Norman Lear Center, 2010).

While the practice of weaving an educational element into story lines has been in existence since television was invented—and increased in the 1970s as a result of a widely disputed Surgeon General's report on media effects (Hendershot, 1998)—it appears that the practice of paying for the luxury of advancing one's agenda is

unprecedented. Although it is difficult to criticize foundations and other philanthropic organizations that are attempting to improve our awareness of social issues and, in turn, improve society, this practice deserves to be examined for several reasons:

(1) Paying for programming poses questions of agency. Who is making decisions about which issues are being embedded and which issues are being negated, or silenced? How do these people obtain the power to make those decisions? How do they maintain that power? Who is being targeted by these messages? What are the overt and covert motives behind the desired changes in behavior?

(2) Relying on E-E to educate the public calls traditional education into question. Should we be concerned about this strategy's long term pedagogical effects? How does it relate to strategies supported by critical pedagogy advocates? What are these programs teaching; or, perhaps more importantly, what are viewers learning regardless of what producers are teaching?

(3) Embedding social messages into entertainment programming raises questions about the importance of media literacy. Does the fact that this strategy is intended to "trick" us into learning about issues while being entertained negate the need for media literacy according to these producers and scholars? Or does this strategy increase the need for media literacy? Or are producers and scholars trying to confirm the largely discredited "hypodermic needle" model of media effects? If so, how does this strategy fit into other pedagogical methods, and how can one guarantee a positive effect on society? And how can that effect be adequately measured, interpreted, and evaluated?

To begin to answer these and other critical questions, I have drawn upon information obtained directly from organizations such as The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Norman Lear Center, and other organizations associated with E-E, existing E-E literature, news reports, existing media effects research, critical pedagogy research, the work of Michel Foucault, and articles that stemmed from Foucault's work regarding the self, discipline, and governmentality to critically analyze how the strategy is being used in the U.S. and abroad. My goal for this critical/cultural critique is to illuminate important issues associated with E-E that deserve examination, particularly problems that arise from power structures that are both apparent and hidden, concerns about the strategy's long-term pedagogical impacts, and the potential for E-E to increase, rather than decrease, oppression of marginalized groups.

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. The first is intended to read as a review of literature and provides an introduction to the history of E-E, including a survey of its evolution over the last several decades and its theoretical framework. It also contextualizes E-E within three theoretical frameworks: governmentality, critical pedagogy, and post-colonialism.

Governmentality and critical pedagogy largely inform the next two chapters, which provide case studies that examine E-E's use within a U.S. context. Although the majority of interventions take place outside of the United States, the use of E-E is enjoying a resurgence within American culture due to funding by nonprofit organizations. Given this boom, and the fact that little research has been done examining the practice, I included a discussion of its use abroad in Chapter One and chose to focus the majority of this project on domestic interventions.

Chapter Two investigates *Get Schooled*, a five-year initiative funded by Viacom and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation designed to, "generate greater awareness and engagement in addressing the nation's education crisis and to offer practical resources and support to students" (*Get Schooled*, press release, September 8, 2009). Although *Get Schooled* producers do not officially label the initiative an E-E intervention, it fits the profile. While working to improve the nation's education system is a noble act, I draw upon Foucault, Giroux, McChesney, and other noted scholars to argue that *Get Schooled* raises questions about the importance of media literacy and fails to address important problems contributing to the education crisis due to its sources of agency, capitalistic interests, and perpetuation of attitudes toward entitlement.

Chapter Three provides an ideological critique of episodes of two popular prime-time entertainment programs that have been used to communicate health-related messages: *Grey's Anatomy* and *Law & Order: SVU*. The episode of *Grey's Anatomy* follows an 18-year-old Hmong woman who cannot undergo a vital surgery until a shaman retrieves one of her souls. The American doctors at Seattle Grace hospital demonstrate their arrogance as they ultimately accommodate, yet refuse to try to understand the ritual. I argue that the program further marginalizes the Hmong culture, as well as any other viewpoint that is not in line with Western medicine. The episode of *Law & Order: SVU* appears to be encouraging condom use and attempting to decrease methamphetamine use by exposing the "risky" behaviors often enacted by gay men who use drugs. But when examined from a critical/cultural perspective, the show characterizes gay men who use drugs as murderers, blames them virtually completely for the advance of a new "killer" strain of HIV that is resistant to anti-viral drugs, and

indirectly alludes to the idea that it is acceptable to slaughter individuals infected with HIV to prevent them from killing others by transmitting it through intercourse.

The fourth and final chapter reviews and synthesizes the information contained in the previous three chapters and asserts that E-E is merely a bandage over the root causes of many of the issues producers claim to want to remedy. Further, because television is always embedded with ideology, all producers, not just E-E producers, must be more mindful of what they are "teaching" through their programs. If E-E is accepted as a tool to improve society through media, the phrase "it's only entertainment" is invalid. Intentional or not, mediated messages have some level of influence in the sense that they reflect and reify society. This admittedly is not an earth-shattering conviction, as media scholars have been calling for more mindful use of media for decades. But through this thesis, I intend to add to the dialogue by exposing issues involved with the practice of using media for "positive" ends to demonstrate that E-E, as it is being used in the contexts I am outlining here, is not the answer we need.

Chapter 1

Entertainment-Education: The Good, the Bad, and the Outrageous

> Television teaches. If it didn't, there would be no commercials on the screen, because advertisers want people to learn a behavior, to learn how to buy their products. Television can also teach people to plan their families, fight poverty, continue studying as adults, care for nature, and respect their own bodies. We should use television to save life on Earth.
>
> Miguel Sabido (2005)

An Overview of Entertainment Education

This quote by Miguel Sabido, the man who credits himself for coining the term Entertainment-Education, expresses the power he believes this practice has. Saving life on Earth is, to say the least, a lofty claim. To understand the man and his theories, we must look back at E-E's development over the last several decades.

Singhal and Rogers (2004) offer a comprehensive overview of E-E from a supporter's perspective. As stated above, they define it as, "the process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favorable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behavior" (Singhal & Rogers, 2004, p. 5). The authors claim E-E has the ability to enact social change in two ways. One, "it can influence members' awareness, attitudes, and behavior toward a socially desirable end" (p. 5). This immediately prompts a question about agency mentioned in the introduction. Who has the power to determine what is "socially desirable"? The government? Television networks? Norman Lear? Bill and Melinda Gates? Two, "it can influence the audience's external environment to help create the necessary conditions for social change at the system level" (p. 6). This suggests that E-E's scope has the power to

influence society as a whole, though it also leads one to question if it does indeed have that level of power considering the bevy of conflicting media effects research that has been published over the last century. It is based on the idea of collective efficacy, which the authors define (based on Bandura's 1997 definition) as, "the degree to which people in a system believe they can organize and execute courses of action required to achieve collective goals" (p. 15). They stress that meaningful social change must come from "concerted action" (p. 15) and is not likely to come from "individual efforts" (p. 15).

Singhal and Rogers go on to say that E-E can serve as a "social mobilizer, an advocate, or an agenda setter" (p 6). This stance, of course, involves the agenda-setting theory put forth by Cohen (1963), though it should be noted that numerous studies have been conducted that do not support the agenda-setting theory (Erbring, Goldenberg, & Miller, 1980; Behr & Iyengar, 1985). Although focused more on news than narratives intended to entertain, both studies emphasize the need to take personal experience with issues and other "real world" circumstances into account when evaluating media effects. While they agree that media have some agenda-setting power, Behr and Iyengar (1985) warn, "ignoring [direct experiences] may lead to notably exaggerated estimates of the effects of media" (p. 40). There is no mention of these studies in Singhal and Rogers' chapter, nor is there mention of any scholarly resistance to the strategy.

They do believe, however, that audience members are selective in how they perceive, recall, and use E-E messages for their own purposes. They use Norman Lear's *All in the Family* as an example. While Archie Bunker was intended to be a character who shed light on undue prejudice, some bigoted audience members looked to him as a role model (Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974, as cited by Singhal & Rogers, 2004). This

assertion supports Hall's (1980) work on encoding and decoding, which suggests that audiences can read media texts in three "positions"—a dominant hegemonic position, a negotiated position, and an oppositional position. Media consumers in the first category interpret texts as producers likely intend. This is often referred to as a "preferred" reading. Those in the second group interpret various aspects of the texts differently to suit their needs. Audiences in the final group reject the dominant, "preferred" reading of the text and decode it in a contrary way. The encoding/decoding model has been highly criticized by scholars, and even by Hall himself. It lacks, in Hall's own words, "theoretical rigor" and "internal logical and conceptual consistency" (Hall et al., 1994, p. 255). He goes on to say that the hypothetical "positions" he put forth in his original paper created problems that are difficult to address because they are difficult to test. These issues represent just a few of the major limitations in E-E's theoretical framework. I will address more extensive limitations in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Both Singhal and Rogers have been involved in more than 200 E-E interventions since the mid 1980s (Singhal & Rogers, 2004). The majority of these messages aired in soap operas in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and were produced in conjunction with numerous domestic and international organizations including Population Communications International (now PCI-Media Impact, a nonprofit organization based in New York City), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the BBC World Service Trust.

Population control was one of the first, if not the first, issue addressed through E-E strategies. In 1969, the Methodist Church believed that the rapidly increasing worldwide population posed "a big, if not bigger, threat than nuclear warfare"

(Poindexter, 2004, p. 23). Therefore Rodney Shaw, founder of the Department of Population Problems in the Methodist Church, partnered with David Poindexter, founder and former president of Population Communications International, to address the issue. Together they worked to create radio and television campaigns intended to avoid an imminent "disaster unless hundreds of millions of people in their childbearing years made sensible, reality-relevant family size choices" (p. 23).

After completing a few small to medium-scale interventions, they were able to establish relationships with executives from major television networks that resulted in family-planning information being woven into the storylines of popular primetime programs such as *Maude, Mary Tyler Moore*, and *All in the Family* (Poindexter, 2004). On *Maude,* for example, Maude chooses to have an abortion after she learns she is pregnant with an unplanned (and unwanted) baby. Around the time these initiatives were being implemented, the population growth rate in the U.S. began to slow.

Though they do acknowledge that it is impossible to attribute the declining growth rate entirely to E-E interventions (and are therefore unable to provide direct evidence of the effect), Poindexter and other scholars involved insist that they played an important role. It must be noted, however, that these storylines were being implemented at a time when feminist rhetoric and advances in contraceptive research were surging. The Pill and other methods of birth control were becoming more widely available and accepted in the 1960s and 1970s (Gazit, Steward, & Klotz, 2003), which empowered women to more easily control their fertility. This leads one to question whether *Maude* was leading society or merely reflecting changes to society that were already occurring. It is likely that the many other societal forces at play during this time had a greater impact

than a handful of television programs, but given that it is widely accepted that media both reflect and reify society at some level, it is possible that the programs did play a role.

Due to the apparent success of the interventions in the U.S. (and the idea that populations needed to be controlled elsewhere), Poindexter partnered with Costa Rican radio producer Jose Carlo with the intention of expanding the practice into that country. They created a radio talk show entitled *Dialogo (Dialogue)* that addressed "taboo" issues such as "sex, contraception, and family planning" (p. 26). According to Risopatron and Spain (1980), as cited by Poindexter (2004), the program had a "substantial" impact on the Costa Rican population, specifically "the most poor, most rural, and least-educated people" (p. 26).

From there, Poindexter partnered with Latino film and television director Miguel Sabido in an attempt to assist with population control efforts in Mexico. Sabido had been developing similar strategies and is, according to him, credited for coining the term "Entertainment-Education" (Sabido, 2004). After family planning techniques such as the use of condoms and oral contraceptives were incorporated into popular soap opera storylines, sales of both increased 23 percent (compared to the 7 percent increase the year before) and visits to family planning clinics increased 33 percent. As noted in regard to *Maude* in the United States, these changes in behavior are likely due to a variety of societal factors. It is therefore difficult to establish a causal relationship between E-E campaigns and increases in contraceptive use and visits to family planning clinics.

E-E is based on four theories: MacLean's theory of the triune brain (1973), Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), Bentley's dramatic theory (1967), and Jung's theory of archetypes (1938; 1968). Through a discussion of the debate surrounding social

cognitive theory and the way MacLean's theory of the triune brain can allegedly be used by actors to manipulate emotions and behaviors, I argue that the theoretical framework is flawed at best and unapologetically manipulative at its worst.

Entertainment-Education's Theoretical Framework

As stated above, Miguel Sabido is credited for initially developing and coining the term "Entertainment-Education" (Sabido, 2004). It stemmed from his observation of "tone" present in all human interaction. As a theater director, he noticed that actors have the ability to originate tone from multiple parts of the body, and the effects of each tone can be different. He named each of these areas of the body "nodes" (p. 63) and conducted research to find patterns between nodes used by actors and emotional responses experienced by audiences. He found a connection between using nodes and the emotional responses they produce to educate audiences about social issues.

To solidify his theories, he teamed up with MacLean, who had been working on his theory of the triune brain. According to MacLean (1973) as cited by Sabido (2004), the human brain has three parts: the reptile brain, the mammalian brain, and the neo-cortex. The reptilian part of the brain controls our general bodily functions (breathing, digestion, etc.), the mammalian part of the brain controls our emotions, and the neo-cortex controls higher-level functions such as "analysis, generalization, induction, and deduction" (p. 65). Sabido expanded these ideas and connected them to nodes. Implacability, terror, aggression, sex, and limits are nerve patterns associated with the reptilian brain, strong emotions such as sympathy, emotional pain, and dignity are associated with the mammalian brain (Sabido calls these "limbic nodes" (p. 66), and intellect is associated with the neo-cortex (Sabido calls these intellectual nodes).

Sabido believes actors can channel energy from different parts of the body to generate different emotions within viewers (Sabido, 2004). This energy flows into strategic patterns and produces tone, or tension. He refers to tone as the "essence of human communication" (p. 67). While he acknowledges that tone cannot be measured, he does believe that it can be observed and analyzed.

To further develop his ideas, Sabido turned to Bandura's social cognitive theory, which is also referred to as social learning theory. The theory appears to have been adapted from its original form to accommodate the theoretical needs of E-E. The original focuses on the reciprocal relationship between behavior, environment, and personal factors. Individuals respond to their environments in different ways based on personal cognitive factors (Bandura, 1986). As it relates to E-E, the theory focuses on the ways media connect audiences to their respective societies. Bandura (2004) proposes connections between media influence, one's connections to a social system, and behavior change. He further explains that it contains three different components, or models: a theoretical model, a translational and implementational model, and a social diffusion model.

The theoretical model identifies reasons why people adopt particular attitudes and behaviors, and according to the theory, people learn in two ways: direct experience and social modeling. Education through social modeling can take place interpersonally or through media representations, and according to Bandura (2004), media representations are particularly powerful because, "people's social constructions of reality depend heavily on what they see, hear, and read rather than on what they experience directly" (p. 78). Perceived self-efficacy, collective efficacy, goals and aspirations, outcome

expectations, and perceived facilitators and impediments are also major components of the theoretical model. Individuals want to believe that they can make choices that impact their lives, that people can work together to accomplish common goals, that particular behaviors will result in particular outcomes (both positive and negative), and that some goals may be more difficult to achieve than others depending on the presence of "facilitators and obstacles" (Bandura, 2004, p. 82).

Bandura's point about individuals wanting to believe that they can make choices speaks to Foucault's concepts of governmentality and technologies of the self. According to Foucault (1988), technologies of self compel people to act in such a way that transforms them "in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (p. 18). It may be true that people desire to make choices about their environments, but because E-E is intended to change attitudes and behaviors (Singhal & Rogers, 2004), the choice is not, in reality, a choice. Particular attitudes and behaviors are clearly privileged over others. The "correct" choice has already been made for them.

The translational model is specific to E-E and was developed by Sabido (Bandura, 2004). Sabido uses three types of differential modeling—positive, negative, and transitional—in his E-E interventions. Positive characters reinforce the idea that positive behavior will result in positive outcomes, and negative characters reinforce the idea that negative behavior will result in negative outcomes. Transitional characters begin in negative circumstances, demonstrate positive behavior, and emerge in positive circumstances (Bandura, 2004). That may be true in an ideal world, but as Bandura admitted in 2007, there have been instances in which viewers modeled the negative

character (The Norman Lear Center, 2007). This phenomenon will be discussed further in the section that discusses E-E from postcolonial perspective.

Other aspects of this model include vicarious motivators (role models), attentional involvement such as dramatic music, symbolic coding aids such as summative epilogues, and "environmental support" (i.e. providing resources to communities that further promote particular behaviors and/or changing interventions based on audience feedback to increase the chance that the desired outcome will be achieved).

The social diffusion model expands on the concept of providing environmental support. Nonprofit organizations such as PCI-Media Impact and the Population Media Center have raised funds to pay for producers to create programs that address social problems in developing countries. They therefore serve as "vehicles for social diffusion" (p. 86).

Social cognitive theory also states that messages can produce behavior change through two channels: a direct pathway and an indirect pathway, which passes through a social system. Social networks can intensify a message through discussion and social pressure, if the social system supports behavior change (Bandura, 2004).

Critics have noted limitations in the theory since its introduction in 1986, primarily its inattention to individual factors that make the processes more complex. Cahill (1987) notes that Bandura was "disturbingly selective" as he chose his citations. For example, he supports Phillips' report that there is a correlation between mass media and suicide/homicide rates but ignores Kessler and Stipp's (1984) paper that discredits his results. Kihlstrom and Harackiewicz (1990) call for more research that considers the way nuances in personalities can affect the triadic reciprocal relationship. They go on to

say that the theory also fails to take into account the impact individuals have on their environments just by being a part of them, regardless of their behavior, and call for more research that examines how one's perceptions of particular situations can be changed by merely thinking about them in a different way. Lerner (1990) agrees that more studies that explore "person-context dynamic interactions" (p. 94) are needed. In his words, the theory is, "in need of 'payment' on a metatheoretical and methodological 'promissory note'" (p. 95). Corcoran (1991) perhaps offers the most biting critique, asserting, "Bandura's (1989) emphasis on the cognitive aspects of self-efficacy has contributed little to our understanding of human behavior and the motivation thereof" (p. 157). For Corcoran, Bandura's model fails to adequately address the impact locus of control has on behavior.

Sabido also drew from Bentley's dramatic theory (1967) and Jung's theory of archetypes (1938; 1968). Bentley's dramatic theory categorizes theatre into five genres: tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, farce, and melodrama. Sabido writes that Bentley's theory helped him better understand the relationship between theatre and E-E. According to Population Media Center, Sabido capitalizes on the "slightly exaggerated" nature of melodrama to develop characters that are quite obviously either good or evil (Population Media, 2010). The twist, the Web site says, is that Sabido inserts a third character (who is intended to represent the audience) as an observer of the tension between the protagonist and the antagonist. This puts "the audience into the heart of the action" (Population Media, 2010, para. 7). Jung's theory of archetypes suggests that cultures have particular characters that "play out through history" (Population Media, 2010, para. 8). By identifying culture-specific archetypes, producers hope to more effectively target

their messages. It should be noted, however, that many cultures, particularly cultures in developing countries, have been shaped by a wide variety of influences. It is therefore difficult to assume that all cultures are homogenous enough to target in this way.

In sum, E-E relies on social cognitive theory, a theory that has been critiqued because it fails to take important variables of human behavior into account; MacLean's theory of the triune brain, a theory that explains how to effectively manipulate audiences' emotions; Bentley's dramatic theory, a theory that is used to teach based on unrealistic tensions between good and evil (as well as characters that are supposed to be representative of a heterogeneous population); and Jung's theory of archetypes, a theory that exploits folklore in order to control behavior. This leads me to question the validity of E-E's theoretical framework.

Issues involving E-E's theoretical base are not the only problems in need of examination. Foucault's notion of governmentality, Giroux's work on critical pedagogy, and Dutta's concerns about cultural implications have emerged as important theoretical frameworks that inform this project. The following section provides a preview of governmentality and critical pedagogy as applied to E-E interventions in the United States. Dutta's work is included in the final section, which highlights the potentially negative effects E-E can have when particular values and behaviors are imposed on other cultures.

Entertainment-Education and Governmentality

In order to understand why society is the way it is today, we must look back at our history. Rose (1996) calls this practice a "genealogy of subjectification" (p. 128), which builds on Foucault's notion of understanding our relation to ourselves. Everything in

society is socially constructed, including all problems, technologies, authorities, telecologies, and strategies. We create all problems and solutions as a collective society over time, so it is imperative that we take history into account as we move forward with new socially constructed solutions (like E-E) to socially constructed problems. For the purposes of this discussion, examples of problems include the public education system, population control, and HIV/AIDS. It is, therefore, important to ask questions that seek to determine why the public education system is broken and why some women live in cultures that make discussions about family planning taboo before imposing new power structures.

Rose draws from Foucault to explore these ideas. How power structures are created plays a major role in how we govern ourselves. So how are power structures created? How are self-governing structures created? And how are more subjective notions such as ethics and morals instilled within a society? This is an important addition to the discussion about power relations present in E-E interventions. Who decides which issues are instilled within society through E-E? And how does E-E play a role in the creation and maintenance of power structures?

This leads to questions about the covert nature of the strategy. Howell and Ingham (2001) suggest that covert agendas and power structures are not new by highlighting the importance our society has placed on fitness and self-discipline. While jogging became popular in the 1970s, and Jane Fonda became an icon in the 1980s due to data that told Americans exercise is important, an emphasis on fitness actually dates back to the 1940s when "approximately one third of the 20 million men examined between 1940 and 1946 were found unfit for [military] service" (p.333). The National Committee

on Physical Fitness was created in 1943 in an attempt to increase the number of men physically fit to serve. This suggests that the popularization of jogging and the rise of Jane Fonda did not occur based on "market promotional forces" alone as many people may believe (p. 333). It was initiated by the government due to a need for physically fit soldiers. This scenario serves as an example of the complexity of our social history. What we believe to be the cause of our thoughts and behaviors (Jane Fonda says it is good for us) may actually be rooted in a larger governmental or corporate initiative. This could be happening again with First Lady Michelle Obama's anti-childhood obesity campaign *Let's Move*. It is positioned as a campaign to raise healthy kids and end childhood obesity within one generation (Let's Move, 2010). Is it a coincidence that the initiative launched shortly after the Washington Post reported in November 2009 that, "about 75 percent of the country's 17- to 24-year-olds are ineligible for military service" in part because they are overweight (Davenport & Brown, 2009, para. 3)?

This point can be observed in the use of E-E in developing countries for population control purposes. Serial dramas in Mexico, for example, contained plot lines that discouraged large families (Poindexter, 2004). Women may have felt that the plot lines were empowering them to take family planning into their own hands (and they arguably did), but the agenda stemmed from the Mexican government's need to control population growth, not the government's desire to empower women.

But wait; is this not a win-win? Women are becoming empowered and children are being encouraged to be healthier. Who cares if there is an ulterior motive? Can we not have both healthy children and strong military? Can we not have women who make their own family planning choices and a government concerned about population

increases? Sure, but as Rose (1996) states, we need to look at the past before we are able to fully grasp problems in the present. These interventions are bandages, not solutions. What causes childhood obesity, for example? Although genetic factors can play a role in some cases, many children simply eat too much fast and processed food and exercise too little. Why is that lifestyle on the rise?

Howell and Ingham (2001) examine the implications of President Reagan's 1980s push for self-discipline. Reagan's attitudes toward self-discipline, in their view, led to the birth of the Yuppie. As successful people began making more money and focusing on their individual affluence that they created through hard work and self-discipline, they began to focus more on consumption. In addition to initiating a rise of our consumer culture, it created a paradox between physical fitness and capitalism. We are supposed to focus on fitness according to experts, but our consumer culture and the incessant drive for profit leaves little time for exercise. Ever-increasing "time-saving" technological capabilities that allow one to work from anywhere in the world further decrease time available to enjoy the life capitalism promised. We have money to spend on gym memberships, yet we, as a country, are more obese than ever before. Parents who work long hours often choose food that is convenient over food that is wholesome, despite the added fat, sugar, salt, and artificial ingredients. To be clear, I am an advocate of self-discipline and am not demonizing Reagan or blaming him for childhood obesity. I am, however, asserting that there is a connection between incessant consumerism and childhood obesity. Yet because our global economy needs consumption to grow, the root is not being addressed on a large scale. Power structures of many types have created a culture in which we are expected to work, spend, and consume, despite the tolls that

lifestyle is taking on our bodies, our families, and our environment. Connecting this back to Foucault, these power structures have disciplined us. We may feel more independent because we have more income; but we are also slaves to our drive to produce more and consume more. A realignment of our priorities and our relationships toward work, people, material goods, and our food sources would be far more liberating.

In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) addresses this issue in the context of a genealogy of military discipline. Just as civilians are disciplined to work hard for monetary gain, sometimes ignoring ill consequences, soldiers are disciplined to serve their respective countries to the best of their abilities at all costs. Foucault writes:

> The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination (p. 138).

In sum, Foucault is suggesting that military training increases one's power over his or her physical abilities but at the same time decreases one's autonomy. Yes, people in the military need to be physically fit and obedient—I am not arguing against that. I am using this as another example of the paradox created by technologies of the self. Self-discipline can be a desirable trait, but the neoliberal power structures that have historically come with it can create problems. Foucault emphasizes that we are always subject to governmental power, so it is imperative that we continuously critique power

structures present within society. Due to the inherently opaque nature of E-E, it is important to think of the practice from this perspective. Governmentality will be examined further in the contexts of *Get Schooled, Grey's Anatomy,* and *Law & Order: SVU.*

Entertainment-Education and Critical Pedagogy

One of the primary goals of critical pedagogy is to empower students to become active participants in their education process. Students are encouraged to question given information, have a voice in their classroom environment, and participate in dialogue intended to illuminate differing points of view and produce social change. If the overarching goal of E-E is to teach audiences while they think they are merely being entertained, it appears that producers are hoping audiences will passively consume embedded messages. This practice bypasses the critical thinking process and uses models that have been widely discredited in media studies. To be fair, producers have acknowledged that some audiences interpret messages differently, but as noted above, even that model has some limitations.

An article by Slater, Rouner, and Long (2005) claims to be among the first to examine "how television might affect viewer support for controversial policy positions" (p. 235) and demonstrates the conflict between E-E and critical thinking. They hypothesized that viewers would be more likely to support policies after viewing an entertainment program that advocated for the policy, largely because absorption in the program would disrupt traditional persuasion processing. Previous ideology might be suppressed, along with counterarguments and a "weakening" of the relationship between ideology and values discussed in the program such as a "crime free society" (p. 249).

The study evaluated the persuasive effects of two separate television dramas—one that addressed same-sex marriage and another containing a plotline about the death penalty. Results were mixed. Both appeared to be successful at suppressing counterarguments but only one, the episode about the death penalty, was able to shift ideological views among the majority of viewers. The authors were therefore unable to establish a definitive causal relationship but still maintain that the results "support the proposition that television dramas can influence support for controversial public policies" (p. 248). The next step, in their view, is to find out why some programs are more effective than others at creating persuasive effects (i.e. suppress counterarguments and shift existing ideology).

The contradictory relationship between E-E and critical pedagogy is also illustrated by the *Get Schooled* initiative outlined at the beginning of this volume. The primary goal of the campaign is to improve America's education system. According to its Web site, "*Get Schooled* is founded on the belief that our nation can be made stronger by educating the minds and improving the skills of every American" (*Get Schooled*, 2010, para. 1).

But components of the campaign lead me to question if that is indeed its true motivation. The campaign launched with a 30-minute program that followed three young professionals through a typical project: a marketing executive employed by LeBron James, an NBA star who did not attend college, Kelly Clarkson's music producer, an individual who also did not attend college, and one of President Obama's speech writers who attended Harvard. *Get Schooled's* emphasis on celebrities, decisions to feature two highly successful individuals who did not attend college (Clarkson's producer and

LeBron James) and one individual who attended a college considered to be out of reach by most Americans (Obama's speech writer who attended Harvard), as well as its shameless promotion of Viacom brands, call the program's sincerity into question. If the goal is to encourage all American students to pursue some form of higher education (two-year, four-year, technical school, etc.), why demonstrate massive success without a college education? The music producer mentions during the program that he plans to return to college and finish his degree, but it is likely that aspiring music producers would question the value of that notion since he has achieved so much without one.

Promotion of Viacom brands is another major issue. Nickelodeon characters and artists frequently featured on Viacom networks are (in)directly promoted throughout the 30-minute program. One might think doing so merely makes good business sense, but a video about the Detroit public school system posted several months later on *Get Schooled's* official website illuminates larger issues. An interviewee notes that students in Detroit are part of a system that graduates only 20 percent of its Black males. He is noticing that these men are often turning to music, basketball, and drug dealing in hopes of achieving the lavish lifestyles they see Black men achieving in these professions (large houses, fast cars, bling, etc.) Where do these men see these images? Largely on programs such as *MTV Cribs, Pimp My Ride*, another Viacom program, and countless other shows on BET, MTV, VH1, and their sister channels. If Viacom were truly serious about supporting youth, would it not make good sense to evaluate what their flagship channels are communicating to them?

In addition to the blatant commercial benefits Viacom enjoyed during *Get Schooled*, the program might be pushing the agenda of commercializing education. The

same video about the Detroit dropout problem appears to support No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) notion of charter schools. This is problematic from a critical pedagogy perspective. Scholars such as Giroux (2003) have suggested that NCLB has set up public schools to fail because failures open doors to not only charter schools, but also corporate intervention. Problems stemming from corporate interventions in public schools will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

Finally, the *Get Schooled* initiative plays into Generation Me's well-documented sense of entitlement (Twenge, 2006). The website's original "Student's Bill of Rights" appears to absolve students from the responsibility of learning and places blame on the education system as a whole. Students have the "right", for example, to seek advice on college planning, as well as the right to teachers who help them prepare for life and classes that help them excel. That may be true, and it cannot be denied that some public school systems do not offer either to the fullest extent possible, but these rights ignore the responsibilities students have to take advantage of the opportunities they do have. Critical pedagogy's goal of empowering students to take ownership directly contrasts with these rights. If the goal is indeed to educate minds and help students become skilled, encouraging critical thinking and fostering a sense of responsibility as opposed to a sense of entitlement are, in my mind, better strategies. These concepts will be explored in more detail in Chapters Two and Three.

Entertainment-Education from a Post-Colonial Perspective

According to its Web site, PCI-Media Impact has distributed more than 242 productions in 27 countries using a variety of media, including "radio and television

serial dramas, comic books, documentaries and public service announcements" (PCI-Media Impact, 2009b, para. 2). There are four facets to its mission:

> Produce: We produce social change radio, television shows and new media programs.
> Train: We train individuals and organizations to use the power of broadcast media.
> Advise: We provide a bridge between broadcast media and social change agents.
> Impact: We demonstrate effectiveness with measurable results (para. 4).

The Web site explains:

> PCI-Media Impact's entertaining programs carry research-based and culturally sensitive messages that catalyze measurable personal and community action. Working with the most experienced local partners and technical and production consultants, the radio and TV shows we produce combine the power of storytelling with the reach of broadcast media (para. 3).

There is much to address in PCI-Media Impact's self-description. The first issue is the notion that the messages are research-based. It cannot be denied that research does indeed go into some programs, but the validity of the research can be questioned. Singhal and Rogers (2004) explain that E-E incorporates three types of research: formative, process, and summative. Formative research includes primarily demographic research, which is intended to ensure the messages are well-targeted. Process research is conducted after the message airs and is based on audience feedback. This research is used to tweak messages to better reach audience members. Summative research evaluates the overall effect the messages had on audiences. This type of research generally includes audience surveys, content analysis of the messages, and various forms of audience feedback such as letters written by audience members. It should be noted that much of this data, particularly audience letters, is anecdotal evidence, not empirical evidence. The authors also note that the use of research varies widely depending on the project, from extensive research to very little. The intensity of the message varies as

well. Some messages are intended for use in one part of one episode of one program while others are incorporated in multiple scenes of multiple episodes of a long-running program.

Usdin, Singhal, Shongwe, Goldstein, & Shabalala (2004) present what appears to be an ideal example of the research process in action (from an E-E proponent's perspective). The authors report that researchers at the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication dedicated 18 months to collecting and interpreting data to determine the best way to approach an intervention combating domestic violence in South Africa. The soap opera, entitled *Soul City IV*, features a woman trapped in a cycle of spousal abuse. She struggles to fight social norms that condone domestic violence and eventually rallies her neighbors to help her put her husband behind bars. Information collected through "(1) stakeholder consultations, (2) literature reviews, (3) case studies of abused women and abusers, (4) general audience research, and (5) workshops held in association with the National Network on Violence against Women (NNVAW)" informed character selection and script writing (p. 156). Producers "toned down" the abusive spouse, for example, because test audiences found him "too monstrous" (p. 158). They also decided to spend more time highlighting cycles of abuse by making the abusive character "nicer" (p. 158) in episodes between violent exchanges and also made other characters seem more genuine. A friend of the abused woman acted in a way that was too idealistic for South African audiences (viewers did not buy into the idea that the friend would not allow her to return to her abusive home).

The producers claim *Soul City IV* was a success. It reached 16.2 million people, which equated to 79 percent of the target audience, earned six Avanti Awards, which are

similar to Emmy Awards, and approximately 36 percent of audience members surveyed said they, "talked to someone about domestic violence in the period during and shortly after exposure to the series" (p. 172). And, according to the credits following a clip that has been posted on YouTube, the domestic abuse help line that was set up as part of the project answered 180,000 calls while the program was on the air.

But what happens when things go wrong? That issue was brought up at an event celebrating Bandura's Everett Rogers Award, an honor bestowed on him by the Norman Lear Center in 2007 (The Norman Lear Center, 2007). During a question and answer period following a lecture by Bandura, a woman in the audience asked about "unintended consequences" of E-E interventions. Bandura deferred to Sabido, who uttered an answer, but it was unfortunately incomprehensible on the video and was not included in the transcript. Bandura followed up with references to instances in which Sabido was able to overcome opposition by tweaking his strategies. The most troubling happened in India. Bandura states:

> And…in the formative period you have to go in and find what effects your program is having. In the India one, it turned out that a good number of the viewers were modeling after the negative model, so you have to fine-tune it again (p. 21).

The fact that viewers were emulating the negative model in this case demonstrates that the strategy can be dangerous in the sense that it cannot be controlled because audiences are rarely passive. It is a tool intended to manipulate human behavior that, effectiveness issues aside, can be used for positive and negative ends despite the best of intentions. This again highlights problems with agency—who decides what issues should be privileged and which should be silenced? Who decides what is positive and negative?

And what happens when people do not respond in the way the producers intend? That could create a mess larger than the one producers are trying to fix.

An example of that came later in the question and answer period. A gentleman stated (The Norman Lear Center, 2007):

> Yeah, I want to tell you about the negative affects [sic] that we had in Mexico. The telenovelas were produced based on an infrastructure, okay? We had the adult education, as you saw, for Mexico. And then the show was sold by the network to another country, in this case Peru. We learned one of the negative effects is if you don't have the infrastructure to back it up: People were rioting in the street because in Peru there were not schools for them, for the adults. Part of entertainment-education is using the infrastructure available and then using Dr. Bandura's theories and Miguel Sabido models of script writing.
>
> The same thing happened with the family planning. The telenovelas would air in other countries with different infrastructures, and those countries wouldn't explain what contraceptive methods there were. That's one negative thing, and that's a very, very negative thing because it really acts as a vaccine. If people want to move and go to an infrastructure to learn how to read and write, but they find that there's nothing to support that, that's like vaccinating them against that proposal (p. 22).

David Poindexter, who was in attendance, was quick to respond:

> When that was shown in Peru, family planning was against the law. And people were literally almost rioting in the streets. It created so much pressure on the government of Peru that they reversed their policy and adopted family planning. So it's not all negative… (p. 23).

This exchange highlights several problems. One, programs that are being produced based on formative research conducted in a particular country are being sold to other countries without consideration for the other country's infrastructure. This demonstrates that people involved are not forward-thinking enough to realize that the programs could do more harm than good in certain contexts. This does not give me confidence in the people involved with E-E. Two, it is troubling that Poindexter suggests in his answer that "literally almost rioting" is a positive outcome of E-E. Although I am

not sure what it means to "literally almost" riot, are there not other, more peaceful ways to enact social change than riots? Progress has indeed been made throughout history through riots, so it is worth considering that a policy change that results from a demonstration could be positive. But his answer again highlights the fact that positive and negative behaviors and outcomes are not black and white. Who gets to decide what is positive and negative?

The next issue to consider is PCI-Media Impact's statement that the messages are "culturally sensitive" (PCI-Media Impact, 2009b, para. 3). According to Dutta (2007), the cultural sensitivity approach is one of two distinct areas of health communication practice (within a cultural context) that has emerged in recent years. The other is the culture-centered approach. Health communicators who apply the cultural sensitivity approach tailor health messages to specific cultures by taking widespread cultural characteristics into account. While this strategy is viewed by some as a positive step toward more effective intercultural communication, it is viewed by others as negative because it often advances dominant, hegemonic ideas about healthcare, largely because only mainstream ideas are conveyed. The culture-centered approach, in contrast, "puts culture at the core of health communication practices" (p. 304) and promotes dialogue between dominant and marginalized groups within a culture. This ideally encourages oppressed groups to identify and begin to solve their own healthcare problems and therefore avoids the (un)intentional perpetuation of oppression that can occur when dominant points of view are privileged. This connects to critical pedagogy mentioned above. Just as critical pedagogy scholars seek to empower students to take ownership in

their education, Dutta is suggesting that societies, if given a voice, can take ownership of their own healthcare problems.

According to Dutta (2006), "Minimal attention is paid to questions of ideologies and values that drive E-E campaigns" (p. 221). In Dutta's view, ignoring the issues of agency, power structures, and the imposition of dominant, Western ideals on subaltern populations that can (un)intentionally arise during interventions could lead to a more severe marginalization of those populations rather than empower them as the producers claim to intend.

Toque Magico (*Magic Touch*), a telenovela that aired in Ecuador in 2008, is an example of a culturally-sensitive mediated message created through a collaboration between PCI-Media Impact and Colectivo Pro Derechos Humanos, an Ecuadorian human rights organization. It is a twelve-episode radio program intended to promote "gender equality, elimination of discrimination, and the prevention of violence against women" (PCI-Media Impact, press release, 2009). It was originally part of an hour-long live, call-in talk show titled *Ponte Once* (*Pay Attention*), which reportedly reached 50,000 listeners in the province. The program has since been rebroadcast on 20 additional radio stations in Ecuador and posted on Facebook and YouTube. Its target audience is ages 15-24.

Toque Magico is set at the School of Magic and Wizardry, a fictional institution that could be considered similar to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, an imaginary educational facility for young adults made popular by the *Harry Potter* novel series. PCI-Media Impact's synopsis of the program follows (PCI-Media Impact, press release, 2009):

> Throughout the series…young witches and sorcerers are forced to deal with issues of bribery, gender discrimination, teen pregnancy, and sexual assault. The

> narrator, Amita, and her trusted assistant, Dictionary, guide listeners through the struggles faced not only by the radio drama characters, but by young children throughout the province of Manabí, Ecuador. Listeners often called in after the show with questions, comments, and personal stories inspired by the educational soap opera (para. 3).

It sounds good, but a critique of the program demonstrates that *Toque Magico* is problematic and, if I may be frank, utterly ridiculous. It is condescending in its production value and overly-simplistic narratives. Social change is modeled in a fantasy world that seems much too juvenile for a target audience ages 15-24. During one episode, for example, Reinaldo, a teen who fathers a child and attempts to abandon its mother, is turned into a toad through wizardry. Because he repents in the series finale, a professor at the school takes pity on him and turns him back into a person, though it is noted during the episode that not all of his toad-like features are reversed. Deadbeat fathers obviously do not turn into toads in reality, nor do they usually repent. Dealing with serious social issues, in my view, necessitates a more mature approach.

The program also uses euphemisms to make its points. Condoms, for example, are called "magic hoods," and abortion is referred to as "turning out the light" in a womb. While the use of a fantasy world and euphemisms may help make the social change less invasive, it also presents a false sense of reality and may create unrealistic expectations for listeners.

This childish style makes *Toque Magico* a prime example of what Shohat and Stam (1994) call infantilization. The authors provide a plethora of examples of Western media in which minorities are portrayed as children in need of parenting from White men and women. This is a common way Westerners are presented as superior to other

cultures. In this case, the "parents" are in New York City, though to be fair, they did collaborate with an Ecuadorian organization.

The series is also neocolonial in the sense that it is imposing "new" Western values such as condom use and less defined gender roles on an already colonized country. Ecuador was colonized by the Spanish in the mid-1500s, and although its citizens gained independence approximately 300 years later, remnants of colonial culture remain. More than 90% of citizens, for example, are Roman Catholic. The Catholic Church is noted for its opposition to abortion and contraception and support of abstinence outside of marriage. While those perspectives were dominant in Western culture as late as the 1950s, social movements in the 1960s and 1970s largely replaced those values with new ideas about sexual liberation. *Toque Magico's* strong emphasis on the use of condoms, acceptance of abortion, and direct refutation of positive attitudes toward abstinence reflect those new Western ideals (and impose them on listeners).

The program's portrayal of gender roles also represents Westernized views. Just as supporters of the American feminist movement fight hegemonic, stereotypically masculine and feminine gender roles, *Toque Magico* stresses that men can be "decorators" (a task generally done by "witches"), and women can be "ghost hunters" (a task generally done by "sorcerers"). Decorating and ghost hunting parallel the now-trite ideas that women can thrive in traditionally "masculine" fields such as math and science, and men can successfully perform traditionally "feminine" roles that require more creativity. It should be noted, however, that *Toque Magico* merely expands gender roles—it does not address homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered individuals, nor does it touch on relationships between races. Heterosexual love between two people of the same

race is championed throughout the program. I speculate that could be because we are still grappling with homosexuality as a country. Same-sex marriage was recently voted down in California and Maine, for example, so we are not yet ready to impose an acceptance of LGBT couples on other nations.

The use of a fictional setting that so closely resembles the school Harry Potter attends advances Western ideas of what is considered to be entertaining. In addition to *Harry Potter*, which hit book shelves almost a decade ago, fantasy books such as *Twilight* and children's programs such as Disney's *Wizards of Waverly Place* are incredibly popular in Western culture. It appears that the producers of *Toque Magico* believed that the concept of wizardry would be popular among Ecuadorian teens as well and have therefore impressed it upon them. It is also possible that they are trying to create a new market (or perhaps expand an existing market) for that type of entertainment to be bought and sold.

Am I arguing against increasing knowledge about birth control or women's rights? Absolutely not. And admittedly there may be instances when the cultural sensitivity approach is the only way to educate a population about an important issue. But hiding messages in entertaining programming, combined with the idea that the programs suppress critical thinking, impose Western values on non-Western countries, and stem from the original goal of controlling reproductive behavior, raises several red flags.

Bandura (2004) interestingly discusses ethical issues that arise when E-E interventions are enacted in developing countries. "Ethical evaluations will depend on who selects the types of changes to be promoted, the agents of change, the means used,

and the choice and voluntariness of exposure to the influence" (p. 87). He stresses that "cultural and value analyses" are performed prior to the development of E-E programs and "the dramatizations are…grounded in the internationally endorsed human values codified in the United Nations covenants and resolutions" (p. 87). By making these statements, it is clear that Bandura recognizes the need to be mindful of agency; but his words still lead me to question how power structures are monitored in practice. As mentioned above, Singhal and Rogers (2004) acknowledge that the amount and types of research used vary by project. How can one guarantee that producers adhere to the United Nations' view of what constitutes human values? And from a Foucauldian perspective, the fact that the United Nations has the power to decide what human values are deserves to be examined.

Singhal and Rogers (2004) close their chapter with hopeful statements about E-E's ability to transcend differences, promote peace, and reduce oppression. On the contrary, if power relations are not clarified, E-E has the potential to perpetuate oppression through culturally questionable and neocolonialist ideals masked as empowering information. This could have an anti-emancipatory effect on the populations targeted by producers. Understanding why social systems are oppressive and working toward collective social change through dialogue would be a better approach.

Chapter 2

Get Schooled: A Paradox of Profit and Pedagogy

> Education for profit? In a climate where college budgets are being slashed across the country and teachers are being laid off in droves, the idea that there is money to be made on education feels a bit counter-intuitive.
>
> *Get Schooled* (2010)

On September 8, 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Viacom launched *Get Schooled,* a five-year initiative designed to, "generate greater awareness and engagement in addressing the nation's education crisis and to offer practical resources and support to students" (*Get Schooled*, press release, September 8, 2009). Launch-date festivities included a live event at the Paramount Pictures lot in Hollywood, CA that featured a screening of a 30-minute television program, performances by Jesse McCartney and Monica (*Get Schooled*, press release, September 2, 2009), and speeches by Bill Gates, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Tony Miller, filmmaker Davis Guggenheim, Arianna Huffington, New York City Department of Education Chancellor Joel Klein, and Los Angeles-area High School Athletic Director Stephen Minix. It was emceed by Stephen Colbert.

The live events were not televised to my knowledge, but the 30-minute television program aired nationwide in prime time (8 p.m. ET) on 21 of Viacom's networks, including BET, BET J, CMT, CMT Pure Country, Comedy Central, Logo, MTV, MTV Jams, MTV Hits, MTV2, mtvU, Nick at Nite, Nickelodeon, Nicktoons, Noggin, Spike TV, The N/Teen Nick, TV Land, VH1, VH1 Classic and VH1 Soul. By airing the show on 21 networks, the Gates Foundation and Viacom reportedly hoped that the program

would serve as a "roadblock" for viewers in their target audience, significantly increasing the probability that they would see it. Officials report that a total of 12.7 million viewers watched the program, which made it the most-watched cable show of the day (*Get Schooled*, press release, September 11, 2009). A corresponding Web site, www.getschooled.com, was launched simultaneously (*Get Schooled*, 2009a).

The program follows young professionals Latesha Williams, Jason Halbert, and Sarah Hurwitz through a "typical" day. Williams is a sports marketing executive who works for NBA star LeBron James, Halbert is Kelly Clarkson's music director, and Hurwitz is a speech writer for President Obama. During the program, Williams puts together a charity bike-a-thon for James, Halbert creates a new arrangement for one of Clarkson's songs, and Hurwitz drafts a speech that President Obama delivered when new Supreme Court Justice Sonja Sotomayor was sworn in.

Though *Get Schooled* officials call the program a documentary (*Get Schooled*, press release, September 8, 2009), its use of celebrities and storylines to present its messages in entertaining ways makes it a prime example of Entertainment-Education (E-E). While attempting to improve the nation's education system is a noble act and is an effort I applaud on some levels, this initiative becomes problematic when examined from a critical/cultural perspective.

Through a critique of the original program and select components of the initiative released on *Get Schooled's* Web site between September 2009 and May 2010, I argue that *Get Schooled's* sources of agency, capitalistic interests, use of celebrity, and perpetuation of attitudes toward entitlement decreases its credibility, raises questions about the importance of media literacy, and fails to address important problems

contributing to the education crisis. To illustrate these issues, I draw upon McChesney's (2008) work involving the political economy of media, critical pedagogy scholars' critiques of the relationship between corporations and public schools, and concerns about Generation Me's well-observed and well-documented sense of entitlement.

The Political Economy of Media and the Dangers of Corporate Involvement in Education: An Examination of *Get Schooled's* Sources of Agency

Political economy of media is defined as, "a field that endeavors to connect how media and communication systems are shaped by ownership, market structures, commercial support, technologies, labor practices, and government policies" (McChesney, 2008, p. 12). McChesney continues, "The political economy of media then links the media and communication systems to how both economic and political systems work, and social power is exercised, in society" (p. 12). *Get Schooled* connects three institutions with significant social power—the Gates Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and Viacom—through this framework.

The first, and perhaps most troubling, aspect of *Get Schooled* is Viacom's participation. As one of the "Big Six" media conglomerates, along with General Electric, the Walt Disney Company, News Corp., TimeWarner, and the CBS Corporation, Viacom owns a massive percentage of the world's media (Free Press, 2010). The 21 networks that aired *Get Schooled* represent just a few of the dozens of Viacom's brands. According to its 2008 10-K report (Viacom, 2008):

> We [Viacom] create and acquire programming and other content for distribution to our audiences how and where they want to view and interact with it: on television, the Internet, mobile devices, video games and a variety of consumer products. MTV Networks reaches over 578 million households worldwide via its approximately 165 channels and multiplatform properties (p. 3).

The astonishing 578 million households statistic does not include individuals reached by the company's "Filmed Entertainment" segment, which includes everything associated with Paramount Pictures (Paramount Vantage, Paramount Classics, MTV Films, Nickelodeon Movies, and DreamWorks).

Viacom's extensive reach alone is enough to raise alarm. Political economists of media have long critiqued the megacorporations made possible by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 because of, among other things, the potential for corporate bias and a lack of objectivity. But when one looks at its reach within the context of participation in a campaign that is potentially shaping educational policy (not to mention the types of programming Viacom distributes), there is a lot more in need of critique.

Viacom is of course a corporation, which means that it is legally mandated to maintain a focus on its bottom line (Bakan, 2004). It cannot do anything that could jeopardize payment to shareholders. Because of this fundamental principle, one can assume that Viacom officials believe participation in this program will ultimately create profit. Indeed, there are several instances in the original *Get Schooled* program that suggest Viacom is using this initiative to capitalize on promotional opportunities:

(1) Latesha Williams was able to get Yo Gabba Gabba to perform at her bike-a-thon. He happens to be a Nickelodeon character, which resulted in Nickelodeon signage posted all over the stage. Nickelodeon is a Viacom network.

(2) LeBron James made it very clear to Williams that he wanted Soulja Boy to perform at the bike-a-thon. Although Williams was not able to book him due to his tour schedule, he did enjoy a lot of publicity both during the program and on

Cribs, which immediately followed the *Get Schooled: You Have the Right* premiere on MTV. MTV is a Viacom network.

(3) Monica performed at the Hollywood launch on September 8. Her new reality show *Monica: Still Standing* premiered October 27, 2009 on BET. BET is a Viacom network.

(4) Stephen Colbert emceed the Hollywood launch. His show, *The Colbert Report,* airs on Comedy Central. Comedy Central is a Viacom network.

(5) The official Web site address is www.getschooled.com. The .com domain generally indicates that the Web site was created for commercial purposes. The .org domain is reserved for nonprofit organizations. The fact that .com was chosen suggests that the partnership is expected to produce income.

To many, these examples may merely represent solid business practices. Viacom would of course incorporate characters into programs of which it was a part. (That sounds reasonable, right?)

Noted critical pedagogy scholars would likely disagree. In their book *Counter Narratives*, Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters (2005) write:

> We are living the hallucinatory wakefulness of nightmare reason. It is a time in which U.S. culture and history threaten the autonomy of the human spirit rather than exercise it. Henri Lefebvre (1975) warns that during this present historical conjuncture we are suffering from an alienation from alienation—that is, from a lack of awareness that we exist in a state of alienation.
>
> Educators and cultural workers in the United States living in this twilight of reason are facing a crisis of democracy (p. 118).

In other words, the rise of corporate intervention in virtually every aspect of our lives robs us of our individual autonomy and threatens the democratic process, but it has become so much a part of the fabric of our society that we do not realize it has happened.

Or perhaps we do realize it, but we decide "that's just how things are." We therefore do not question Viacom's involvement in a program intended to change public policy or question its need to profit from it.

Giroux (2003) further expands on the dangers of this lack of awareness of corporate power:

> As corporate culture extends even deeper into the basic institutions of civil and political society, there is a simultaneous diminishing of non-commodified public spheres—those institutions such as public schools, churches, noncommercial public broadcasting, libraries, trade unions, and various voluntary institutions engaged in dialogue, education, and learning—that address that relationship of the individual to public life, social responsibility, and the broader demands of citizenship, as well as provide a robust vehicle for public participation and democratic citizenship. Without these critical public spheres, corporate power often goes unchecked and politics becomes dull, cynical, and oppressive. Public space is portrayed exclusively as an investment opportunity, and any notion of the public becomes synonymous with disorder, disrepair, danger, and risk (p. 156).

Corporate takeover of public space, particularly public schools, certainly has not happened overnight, nor is it anything new. Corporations have been providing schools with grants and supplies for several decades. Without question, private funding provides much-needed resources in the midst of education-related budget cuts around the country. But at what cost? For critical pedagogy scholars, the costs are unchecked consumerism, biased textbooks, and, as highlighted above, the dangers that stem from an ever-shrinking public sphere.

How does this relate to the Gates Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education? Despite being a nonprofit organization, the Gates Foundation's assets totaled nearly $30 billion at the end of 2008 (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010), much of which came from Bill Gates' involvement in Microsoft. It is therefore undeniable that the Gates Foundation has the resources and the connections needed to advance a social

agenda. This can be seen in *Get Schooled*, the paid health-related storylines noted in the introduction of this project, and the countless national and international programs in which the Foundation is involved (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009a). In addition to tackling the U.S. education crisis at both the systemic and individual levels, the organization also funds programs that support libraries, attempt to "break the cycle" of homelessness, and provide emergency relief during natural disasters. Its global portfolio is even more ambitious and includes goals such as providing financial services (banking, etc.) for the poor, investing in agricultural areas, and changing policies that they believe perpetuate hunger and poverty. I am not arguing that this is a bad use of resources—on the contrary, it is admirable that Bill and Melinda Gates have chosen to use a portion of their funds for philanthropic purposes. But it is important to note that the Foundation has the power to address particular issues with particular solutions while ignoring others, furthering specific social and political agendas.

The overall premise of *Get Schooled* appears to be threefold: encourage high school students to graduate, convince them to pursue some form of higher education, and improve the nation's public school system. This is consistent with the education-related goals listed on the Foundation's Web site (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009b). One of the primary objectives of its high school educational initiative is "to help ensure that 80 percent of high school students graduate college-ready, with a focus on low-income and minority young people reaching this target" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009c, para. 8).

Presumably to achieve systemic change, the *Get Schooled* Web site encourages students to send a form letter to their respective governors encouraging them to improve

the public education system in their states. And based on the original *Get Schooled* broadcast, as well as others more recently posted on the corresponding Web site, it is clear that producers are also reaching out to the U.S. Department of Education directly. President Obama is a "supporting actor" in the original program, for example, (he coaches Sarah Hurwitz, a speechwriter who is one of the three professionals featured in the program); and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan is interviewed in a video posted on the Web site that addresses the dropout crisis in the Detroit Public School System. Partnering with the U.S. Department of Education seems like a logical choice, considering that it presumably has the power to address issues plaguing public school systems; but on the other hand, one could argue that the U.S. Department of Education is the entity that has caused many of those problems in the first place. This seemed odd when I began this project, but a possible answer emerged during the final stages.

The much-criticized No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, a bi-partisan bill signed into law during the Bush Administration, continued into the Obama Administration. Under the law, schools are held accountable for students' performances on standardized tests, and schools that do not meet state and federally mandated standards suffer sanctions (U.S Department of Education, 2002). This seems counterintuitive on some levels, as a lack of funding is one of the major reasons why some public schools are failing.

Further, one of the segments in the video about Detroit champions charter schools, which is one of the "solutions" NCLB offers to students who live in underperforming school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Charter schools are, "publicly funded schools created outside the normal public school institutional structures, and outside the purportedly 'onerous' regulations said to govern public

schools" (Molnar, 2005, p. 11). Some have evolved into schools managed by private for-profit corporations.

Discussions about charter schools date back at least to the 1980s, when *A Nation at Risk* was released by the Reagan Administration (Molnar, 2005). The goal of the report was similar to that of NCLB—improve education to ensure that America continues to dominate, or at least remain a leader in, the global marketplace. Policymakers encouraged schools to partner with corporations that could provide the resources and "expertise" necessary to improve the nation's education systems. Supporters argued that the government was not qualified to run schools, that increased competition would encourage public schools to improve, and that charter/privatized schools would be better because they were independent (i.e. not under federal regulations) (Molnar, 2005). Molnar points out that privately-funded charter schools are not without limitations. He cites several examples that highlight companies that put profit before student learning, including a school that disbanded a library in favor of computerized testing stations. He also mentions that there is little solid data that supports the superiority of charter schools when compared to public schools. In sum, Molnar states:

> The lackluster performance of charter schools in raising achievement, and the problems that for-profit school management companies…have experienced together call into question the wisdom of shutting down "failing" traditional public schools and offering students charter schools, because the charter schools may well be worse—especially if they are managed by for-profit firms (p. 104).

Given that the U.S. Department of Education has struggled to find a solution to poor academic performance, I initially questioned why the Gates Foundation chose to advance the views of an entity whose policies are at the core of some of the nation's

education problems. What changes can come when the people who are causing the problems are given a medium to advance their solutions?

The answer has presumably presented itself in the form of the Obama Administration's proposed changes to NCLB (including dropping the name NCLB and returning to the original name of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act). Worded eerily similar to the Gates Foundation's plan, the amendments seek to address some of the limitations in NCLB. Most notably, the changes propose core federal standards currently open to public comment (and gives states the flexibility to expand on those standards), will reward the top 10 percent of schools in some form yet to be announced, will largely leave the middle 80 percent of schools alone, and will focus intervention efforts on the bottom 10 percent of schools. The percentages will largely be determined by "Promoting Power," a formula developed by Johns Hopkins University (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). The equation, not to be confused with graduation rate, divides the number of students enrolled in a school at the freshman level (or sophomore level if the school does not house freshmen) by the number of students enrolled in a school at the senior level. The rationale behind the use of this equation argues that graduation rates are calculated differently across the country. This was developed to standardize those statistics. A series of hearings about the changes is currently being held (Spring 2010) on Capitol Hill (Committee on Education & Labor, 2010).

So does this mean *Get Schooled* is having the systemic impact it was designed to achieve? It would not be inappropriate to speculate, but it appears that the Gates Foundation is working closely with the Obama Administration. It also appears that each share similar goals. The Gates Foundation wants to help 80 percent of students graduate

"college ready" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009c). The Department of Education's plan wants 90 percent of students to graduate "college and career ready" by 2020. Each also calls for a focus on low-income and minority students. If this verbiage is indeed evidence of collaboration, this is nothing new, as lobbyists attempt to get their voices heard and incorporated into policy every day. It makes sense that the Foundation would go to policymakers to advance its educational agenda; but just as "watchdog" groups monitor the influence of lobbyists, the Gates Foundation's influence on government policy must be evaluated, particularly because of its partnership with Viacom. Is this the best approach to changing the system? Perhaps less corporate involvement, less emphasis of consumerism, and more emphasis on thinking critically about the influence neoliberal power structures have on institutions such as public education would be a better choice.

That suggestion includes less emphasis on celebrity, which seems to be a major focus of *Get Schooled*. Dozens of Viacom characters are household names around the world, and, as mentioned above, several of these individuals are either a part of the program or were at least mentioned during the program. Celebrities also appear regularly in videos posted on the *Get Schooled* Web site. This focus on celebrity, coupled with the idea that E-E strategies fly in the face of critical thinking, sends a contradictory message. The following section considers this phenomenon, along with questions it raises about media effects.

Get Schooled's Use of Celebrity and Its Relationship with Media Literacy and Media Effects

The following quote is posted on *Get Schooled's* Web site in conjunction with one of the videos posted: "There's a myth about celebrity: if you're lucky enough to become rich and famous, you don't need that degree you skipped out on" (*Get Schooled*, 2009c, para. 1). That point is well-taken, but it seems that *Get Schooled* is actually perpetuating that myth in some cases rather than refuting it.

The original *Get Schooled* program featured NBA Star LeBron James, who made headlines by being drafted by the NBA directly out of high school. He chose the fame and fortune of the NBA over a college degree. The program also features Kelly Clarkson, who chose the fame and fortune of the music industry over a college degree. Although the focus of the program was on the young professionals and not the superstars who employed them, is it not disheartening to see people who worked hard in school working *for* people who did not for much less money and much less fame? And even though the focus was on the young professionals, it is noted in the program that Jason Halbert, who works for Clarkson, did not finish college. He says during the course of the show that he plans to return to school, but why, viewers may ask, if you can get a sweet gig working for Kelly Clarkson without a degree?

Even more importantly, the video about Detroit features an interviewee who accuses celebrities, specifically Black celebrities, of negatively influencing the teenagers who idolize them. Musicians, especially rappers, and other cultural icons produced by mass media can—intentionally or unintentionally—influence teens to drop out of school and/or sell drugs to produce an income by celebrating a lavish lifestyle. By connecting

with dealers and selling drugs on the streets, teens can make easy money and dress like their favorite rappers, drive new cars, etc. My question is…where do they see those images? One can argue that the lifestyle is around them, but one could just as easily list programs on multiple Viacom networks as possible sources of information.

This leads to questions about what else *Get Schooled' s* target audience may be learning while watching Viacom programs. The core of E-E, embedding social messages into entertainment programming, initiates troubling questions about the importance of media literacy. The strategy is based on the idea that the messages are hidden—viewers are not supposed to know they are being educated as they are entertained. As mentioned in the previous chapter, incorporating messages into television narrative suppresses counterarguments (Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006), which discourages critical thinking. And while the jury is still out on the ability to quantify media's effects on society, it is a widely accepted view that media both influence and reflect society.

Giroux's (2003) critique of corporate culture can be applied here. Both E-E and neoliberal ideology seem to discourage critical thinking. His definition of "corporate culture" refers to, "an ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that functions politically and pedagogically to both govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to fashion compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and *passive citizens*" (p. 158, emphasis added). This sounds very similar to Foucault's concept of governmentality and technologies of the self discussed in the first chapter.

So if the "hidden" messages work, and a large number of viewers absorb the information embedded in the program, how can a viewer know when he or she is being educated and when he or she is being entertained? Ideally viewers would not. So what

impact are other Viacom programs having on teenagers? As noted in the previous section, a critic discussed the negative influence some media characters can have during a video posted on *Get Schooled*, which is partially supported by Viacom. Research needs to be done to explore this specific issue further, but from a theoretical perspective, this question should lead organizations like the Gates Foundation to choose their partners, and the programs they use for E-E messages, much more wisely.

So why did the Gates Foundation partner with Viacom? A potential answer may present itself in the future, as it did with the U.S. Department of Education, but I do not foresee Viacom changing its business model anytime soon. Perhaps the Foundation may think it needs a network like Viacom to reach its audience, which may be a good strategy since Viacom did create a "roadblock" that reached 12.7 million viewers; yet one of the initiative's own productions acknowledges that media images, many of which are visible on the same networks that aired the video, are part of the problem! Therefore, if Viacom is truly committed to supporting programs that help reduce the dropout rate, it might consider reevaluating some of the programs it airs on its networks every day.

If one learns through social modeling as E-E's theoretical framework suggests, one can logically link programs like *Cribs*, *Teen Cribs*, and *Pimp My Ride*, which are specifically designed to celebrate the spoils that come from consumerism, to the well-documented sense of entitlement present in today's youth. Instead of feeling "entitled" to products, it seems that *Get Schooled* wants students to feel "entitled" to an education. Is perpetuating feelings of entitlement a good approach? The next section addresses this question.

"You Have the Right" to Perpetuate Entitlement

The phrase "You Have the Right" is used many times throughout the *Get Schooled* initiative. It is a recurring theme (and the subtitle) of the original *Get Schooled* program and is prominently featured on the Web site as part of a "Students' Bill of Rights" (*Get Schooled*, 2009b). These include:

1. You have the right to seek advice on college planning
2. You have the right to teachers who prepare you for success in life
3. You have the right to classes that help you excel
4. You have the right to frequent progress reports on your performance
5. You have the right to accessible financial aid
6. You have the right to finish what you start

Because education is often viewed as a public service, one could argue that students do have the right to a high-quality education. I personally know of countless situations, however, in which students had full access to educational resources and did not take full advantage of them. I acknowledge that a lack of resources is highly problematic in many parts of the country, but the secondary problem of a lack of student motivation cannot be ignored. Much research has been done in an attempt to identify characteristics in this generation of Americans, and a common theme in many studies is a sense of entitlement (Twenge, 2006). An emphasis on having the right to a meaningful education could be viewed as a way to "play into" students' sense of entitlement rather than solve the motivation issue many teachers struggle to fight every day.

I do not want to sound like a grandparent who often starts stories with the cliché view of life in the first half of the twentieth century (i.e."When I was a child, I had to walk 10 miles to school uphill barefoot, in the snow.") But I must say that when I was a high school student, I did not view seeking advice on college planning as a right. I viewed it as a *responsibility*. At no time did I view higher education as something that

should be bestowed on me. I worked hard to get good grades to increase my chance of getting scholarships, and I worked hard after school to save money for college. Granted, I did not live in an impoverished area, and my parents instilled the value of both work and education in me at an early age—benefits that many high school students do not have. Admittedly in some cases, the neoliberal power structures mentioned above can severely limit opportunities for advancement, making it difficult for many children to succeed. But the core of the point I am trying to make by discussing my personal experience still stands—is it wise to encourage entitlement by suggesting that doing things like "finishing what you start" is a right? Would it not be better to emphasize the importance of working hard to achieve one's goals?

Get Schooled appeared to place very little emphasis on student responsibility in the early stages of the Web site, but that has changed somewhat in recent months. The Students' Bill of Rights includes copy that does seem to put some focus on student responsibility. And in a pair of videos posted within the last few months, for example, producers featured NBA stars who excelled in school before joining a professional team. Instead of using celebrities and athletes who did not go to college to motivate the students, as they have in the past, they used some examples of athletes who did. These selections are better, considering they actually embody rather than contradict some of the messages producers are trying to communicate, but they are still problematic in the sense that they continue to rely on celebrity to get the message across. Why not maintain a focus on people who have worked hard to improve their personal situation through education? I suppose the argument could be that students are more likely to listen to celebrities, but to that I ask what the primary goal is. Is the emphasis on the program

education or advancing Viacom brands and celebrity? Both, it seems, and in light of the critique of Viacom's involvement above, that presents an issue.

In sum, although it is incredibly important to address the educational issues plaguing our nation, and in some ways I admire the Gates Foundation and Viacom for using their resources to combat the problem, the program's contradictions limit its credibility. The power relationships involved are troubling, as are the aspects of the program that discourage critical thinking and promote a sense of entitlement. *Get Schooled* does not fully address the influence other Viacom programs may be having on teens who suffer in underperforming school districts. A few E-E interventions cannot counteract the dozens of other programs that contain messages contrasting those discussed in *Get Schooled.* Each of these problems seems to be juxtaposed (in direct contrast) to the solutions for which the Gates Foundation appears to be looking. Unless these contradictions are remedied, I fear that *Get Schooled* will not make the impact on education we need, and may even worsen the crisis by advancing the passivity that comes from unchecked corporate involvement in public institutions.

Chapter 3

"Spare Me Your White Girl Cultural Divide Love": Marginalization and Dehumanization in Primetime Dramas Used for E-E Interventions

> Not only will viewers remember key health information incorporated into storylines, they will be inspired by these shows to learn more, to call hotlines and to search the web for information. This increased knowledge can lead to healthier personal behavior, heighten their awareness of global health issues, and even impact policy.
>
> Sandra de Castro Buffington, Director
> Hollywood, Health, & Society (2010)

Grey's Anatomy is a highly-popular, primetime, health-related drama that airs weekly on ABC. In 2008, the Kaiser Family Foundation partnered with producers of the program to promote the fact that an HIV-positive mother has a 98% chance of delivering a healthy baby with proper treatment (The Kaiser Family Foundation, 2008). Writers incorporated the information into the script by creating a scene involving Izzie and a white, heterosexual couple. Izzie tells the woman she is pregnant, expecting her to be excited by the news; the woman is anything but excited. Clearly distraught, she demands an abortion. When Izzie questions her, she reveals she is HIV positive and believes it is inevitable for mothers to pass the disease to their children. By sharing the information embedded by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Izzie is able to convince the couple to deliver the child and become parents. Interestingly, neither the mother's health, nor the possibility that abortion could be an option was ever seriously considered during the conversation. This suggests that a specific agenda was being communicated.

To test the effectiveness of this Entertainment-Education (E-E) intervention, the organization conducted a pre-show survey, a post-show survey one week after the

episode aired, and another post-show survey six weeks after the episode aired. The surveys asked viewers basic questions about the messages embedded into the program to gauge comprehension and retention. The first question asked, for example:

> As far as you know, if a woman who is HIV-positive becomes pregnant and receives the proper treatment, what is the chance that she will give birth to a healthy baby—that is, a baby who is NOT infected with HIV (p. 3)?

Fifteen percent of respondents said there is more than a ninety percent chance before the episode aired. Sixty-one percent knew the answer the following week, and forty-five percent knew six weeks afterward. These results were considered highly successful by the Kaiser Family Foundation's standards. The report states, "Viewers' knowledge about mother-to-child transmission rates rose substantially after the *Grey's Anatomy* episode aired, and the new information was still retained by many viewers six weeks later" (p. 3).

Whether or not the increase is substantial is debatable—some may consider an increase from 15 percent to 45 percent successful while others do not. A more important issue is the methodology used during the research process. Researchers used three different samples to calculate the statistics, which means there was no control group used. The information was therefore not retained by the original sample—it was retained by an entirely different group of viewers. This presents a reliability and validity problem and calls the results into question.

Another primetime drama that has been used for E-E interventions is *Law & Order: SVU.* Executive Producer Neal Baer, a medical doctor with a background in film, education, and sociology (Journal of the American Medical Association, 1998), is heavily involved with E-E. His resume includes production work on *ER,* which has also been

used for E-E interventions, and a number of the after-school specials that aired on ABC in the late 1980s (NBC, 2010). It is widely known that those after-school specials were intended to be both entertaining and educational.

Baer has participated in panels and conferences over the last several years and in March 2010 discussed E-E's potential with members of Congress (along with *Law & Order: SVU* star Mariska Hargitay, Representative Donald M. Payne (D-NJ), and a representative from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) at an event sponsored by Hollywood, Health, & Society, a division of the Norman Lear Center that provides health-related content to television writers (Hollywood, Health, & Society, 2010). At the event, Baer said:

> At *Law & Order: SVU*, we incorporate global health topics into our scripts not only because they are important, but also because they are dramatically compelling. Many Americans may not be familiar with the significant health problems faced by people in the developing world. As storytellers, we also have the unique opportunity to shed light on these critical issues (para. 4).

The press release goes on to say:

> Actress Mariska Hargitay is an advocate for survivors of sexual assault and has started a foundation to help them, called Joyful Heart Foundation. They spoke about their commitment to covering HIV/AIDS, sexual violence, and other global problems, and why accurate depictions of global health issues in American primetime TV are critical to saving lives and reducing disease around the world. Hargitay specifically addressed the issues raised in last week's episode, "Witness," about rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo (para. 5).

Why focus on rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo? A blog placed on the front page of *The Huffington Post's* Web site the day the episode aired reveals that the episode is a collaboration between *Law & Order: SVU* producers and the Enough Project, an organization that is attempting to, "prevent genocide and crimes against humanity" (Enough Project, 2010). The blog entry was co-authored by Hargitay and John

Prendergast, co-chair of the Enough Project, but is clearly intended to look like a news article (Hargitay & Prendergast, 2010). Brief author bios are included at the end, but if a reader did not scroll down to the end, it would be plausible that he or she would believe it was written by a journalist. *The Huffington Post* is known for its mix of news and blogs, so this is not anything new, but the ethics of passing off promotion as news are still in question. It should also be noted that Arianna Huffington spoke at the *Get Schooled* launch, so it is clear she is a proponent of E-E interventions.

Despite the blog's ethical limitations, it does offer tragic, yet fascinating information about why rape in the Congo should be of concern to Americans. Rape is a weapon used by individuals who steal tungsten, tin, tantalum, and gold from the region for use in cell phones and other electronics. The blog states, "There are few other conflicts in the world where the link between our consumer appetites and massive human suffering is so direct" (Hargitay & Prendergast, 2010, para. 4). A few paragraphs later, there is a call to action:

> As consumers, we must speak up and demand that the top electronics companies produce conflict-free products. By removing conflict minerals from the equation in Congo, we remove the fuel from the fire. Write to the top electronics companies and tell them you want them to start producing conflict-free phones and laptops (para. 6).

Is this a genuine attempt to help a country in need by changing consumer behavior or good PR intended to boost ratings? Perhaps both. It is no secret that NBC has been struggling to capture viewers' attention. The week "Witness" aired, it was the only NBC show in the top 30 (at number 30), and its roughly 8.5 million viewers paled in comparison to the CBS scripted drama *NCIS*, which lured in 19.5 million. CBS had 17 shows in the top 30 that week, ahead of ABC's seven and FOX's five (City News

Service, 2010). Another program of interest to this chapter, *Grey's Anatomy,* came in at number 19 with almost 11 million viewers.

I was unfortunately unable to find any research that examined how many viewers wrote letters to electronics corporations as of May 2010, but these statistics alone lead me to wonder how many people are actually interested in learning about rape in the Congo, and other "ripped from the headlines" topics. Even so, let us assume that these producers genuinely believe in their mission and are working to advance what they believe is already a successful practice. Why not use television to raise awareness and promote "positive" behaviors? One might even say we need more educational television instead of more *American Idol.* But while this practice may seem positive on the surface, it raises many ethical questions. Most importantly, if viewers are not supposed to know when they are being educated and when they are being entertained, what else are they "learning" from entertainment television? Who gets to decide what is "positive" behavior? And whose ideas about how individuals should maintain and treat their bodies get incorporated, and whose ideas get silenced? This becomes a particularly difficult question to answer when interventions involve intercultural communication, as they often do. Supporters of the strategy take pride in changing cultural norms and behaviors, citing great improvement in HIV and pregnancy prevention practices despite research that suggests it is not working. But at what cost? Dutta (2006) points out, "minimal attention is paid to questions of ideologies and values that drive E-E campaigns" (p. 221).

To illustrate Dutta's assertion, I have chosen an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* titled "Bring the Pain" and an episode of *Law & Order: SVU* titled "Strain." They have not, to my knowledge, been formally designated as E-E interventions, but it is appropriate to use

them as examples for three reasons. One, both *Grey's Anatomy* and *Law & Order: SVU* have been praised as vehicles for E-E interventions. Two, they each contain information that appears to be rooted in fact. This suggests the presence of an educational purpose. Three, if the messages are intended to be invisible, audiences should not know when they are being "educated" and when they are being "entertained." Therefore, viewers could potentially learn from any messages included in a program, especially one that has been "successfully" used as an E-E intervention. And as a side note, Baer is listed as an executive producer for "Strain." Because he is an advocate for E-E's use, especially in *Law & Order: SVU*, it is very likely that particular messages in the program were intentionally embedded. I will offer an overview and analysis of each program separately and then discuss their collective implications.

Grey's Anatomy: "Bring the Pain"

"Bring the Pain" originally aired on ABC October 23, 2005. As is common with the show, several plotlines unfold simultaneously, but they all revolve around a common theme, which, in this episode, is pain. Most of the doctors are struggling with emotionally (and in some cases physically) painful personal and interpersonal issues. A man allergic to pain medication relies on pornography to decrease his discomfort. A woman has a mysterious heart condition that turns out to be aggravated by the pain of grief. The power goes out, and an intern is terrified as he performs his first open heart surgery in an elevator.

A scene of particular interest features Hmong people, an ethnic minority group based in several different parts of Southeast Asia. The family is scorned for rejecting Western beliefs about medicine. Although their views are ultimately tolerated, and the

family's requests are accommodated, the episode clearly demonstrates the notion that Western ideals, specifically Western medicine, are superior to Eastern cultures' views of health and wellness.

After the opening credits, several scenes highlighting childish relationship drama between doctors on staff, and set ups of the subplots listed above, viewers are introduced to Anna Chu, an attractive Asian woman who is having pains in her back. She speaks fluent English and appears to be highly Westernized. After Dr. Derek Shepherd orders morphine to control her pain, Anna's parents burst into the room and demand to know why she did not call before she checked in. She apologizes and introduces them to Shepherd and Dr. Meredith Grey. Shepherd proceeds to explain that Anna has a tumor in her spinal canal that needs to be operated on immediately. With proper treatment she has a 95 percent chance of a full recovery. Waiting another day could cause her to be permanently paralyzed. Despite hearing this news, Anna's father refuses to allow her to go through with it and insists that they discharge her. The doctors plead with him, emphasizing that she needs the surgery, but he remains adamant about taking her home. Before conceding, Shepherd tells Anna that because she is over 18, she does not need her father's consent. Anna respects her father's wishes, however, explaining that because she is Hmong and her father is the elder, she must obey.

The scene abruptly transitions to Grey and Shepherd in a stairwell. Shepherd appears exasperated and exclaims, "Hmong? Let's find out what that is. Contact social services. See if we can get anyone down here and talk to them." Grey asks, "Do I continue to process her discharge?" He responds, "Yes, we have to. It's *insane* (emphasis added), but we have to." This scene is significant because neither doctor

makes any attempt to understand why Mr. Chu demanded that they release his daughter. Instead of asking questions and fostering an intercultural dialogue, they deem the idea "insane" and insist that social services intervene. This suggests that American doctors are disrespectful of patients' wishes if they differ from Western standards.

After updating the situations unfolding with other patients, the camera cuts to Grey giving Anna morphine. She protests, saying she must go home. Grey explains that she will need to sign a release form stating that she is leaving against medical advice. Anna readily agrees. After a few seconds, they engage in this exchange:

> Grey: I know this is new and confusing. I called a social worker, and she's willing to come down and talk to you…
>
> Anna: Spare me your white girl cultural divide love. I grew up down the street from here. I play in a band. I went to UDub. I get it. My father doesn't. If he says no, it's no.
>
> Grey: We're talking about your ability to ever walk again.
>
> Anna: That's what you're talking about. I'm talking about my family. Have you ever even heard of the Hmong people? Our religion has got rules that are way old and way set in stone, and way spiritual, and you don't mess with them. You don't anger the ancestors, even if you pierce your tongue and play in a band.
>
> Grey: What are the rules exactly?

This exchange serves as another example Shohat and Stam's (1994) concept of infantilization (originally noted in the first chapter in reference to *Toque Magico*). Because Grey does not understand the Hmong culture and considers its viewpoints absurd, she takes it upon herself to treat Anna as a child. The words, "I know this is new

and confusing," spoken in a gentle, quite maternal manner, indicate that she feels the need to treat Anna as a child incapable of making her own decisions. As someone who has adapted to Western culture, Anna recognizes Grey's Eurocentric attitude and brings it to her attention.

Grey does finally take the initiative to ask what the rules are. This is good in the sense that she is making some attempt to understand the Hmong people, but as the episode progresses, it becomes clear that she is not asking as a way of gaining knowledge and understanding. She is asking for enough information to find a way to perform the surgery.

The camera cuts to Dr. Miranda Bailey chastising Shepherd for supporting pornography as a pain management technique. He defends himself by citing scientific research that supports the idea that pornography can produce endorphins that lessen the intensity of pain. This conversation is important because it demonstrates that Shepherd is open to exploring alternative forms of treatment, but he cannot fathom the idea that anyone could want a religious ceremony to take place before a medical procedure is performed. This leads me to question whether religion is the enemy here. Would Shepherd react in a similar way if a patient requested a Catholic priest or a Protestant pastor?

Shepherd then runs into Grey, who asks him to talk to Anna's father. She states condescendingly, "I'd do it myself, but apparently having testicles is a requirement." He asks why social services could not help, assumingly because he still believes they are unfit parents. She explains that Anna told her they would be useless to them because her

father believes she is missing one of her souls and cannot go into surgery without it. "We don't need a social worker," Grey says. "We need a shaman."

"A shaman?" Shepherd asks quizzically, as if that is one of the most ludicrous statements he has ever heard.

After more drama surrounding other patients, the camera cuts to Shepherd, who goes outside to speak with Anna's father. It is raining, and he is smoking a cigar. This may have been incorporated by producers to damage Mr. Chu's credibility. What gives a smoker the right to decide what is considered sound medical advice? Their dialogue commences.

Shepherd: Mr Chu! You want to take Anna home for a healing ritual?

Mr. Chu: When sickness comes, it means one of her souls is missing. Anna needs to have her souls intact before she has surgery. She needs a shaman.

Shepherd: You could've told me that.

Mr. Chu: Why? So you could call me a fool?

Shepherd: I respect that you have traditions that I *can't* understand (emphasis added). But you're standing beside me in a $3000 suit, so I also know that you respect the fact that I'm telling you Anna needs this surgery within the next 24 hours if she's going to continue to walk. She can't leave this hospital.

Mr. Chu: She can't undergo surgery without her soul. She'd die.

Shepherd: All right, then. We're just gonna have to get a shaman. Today. In the hospital.

Mr. Chu: Shamans aren't listed in the yellow pages. Our shaman is 500 miles from here. You are an arrogant man.

Shepherd: No, I'm just a guy with access to a helicopter.

At this point, Mr. Chu gives Shepherd a cigar.

Mr. Chu: Finding her soul won't be easy.

Shepherd: It never is.

This portion of the episode reveals both doctors' attitudes toward the Hmong people. Grey acknowledges that the Hmong people have a social hierarchy that privileges men, but does so in a condescending, ridiculing way. Shepherd eventually agrees to try to get a shaman, but not before he admits that he "can't" understand why. In doing so, he misses yet another opportunity to ask questions and attempt to comprehend this part of the Hmong culture. Using the word "can't" expresses his unwillingness and perceived inability to learn about points of view other than his own. It should also be noted that Shepherd chastises Mr. Chu for not telling him the family needs a shaman. This places blame on Mr. Chu for not opening an intercultural dialogue and releases Shepherd from any responsibility, even though Shepherd previously showed no interest in such a dialogue.

Further, even after Mr. Chu rightly calls Shepherd arrogant, he disagrees. To him, there is a difference between arrogance and a highly ethnocentric doctor who has resources, such as helicopters, available to him that most people do not. Countless scholars who study Eurocentrism and whiteness would disagree.

The concept of money is another interesting component of this exchange. The fact that Mr. Chu is wearing an expensive suit, in Shepherd's eyes, opens a door for him to make his case. If Mr. Chu has the ability to make money, and therefore succeed in a capitalistic society, he must be intelligent enough to understand that his daughter needs to

have emergency surgery. Had he not been wearing costly clothing, Shepherd may not have believed Mr. Chu had any merits at all.

The shaman soon arrives by helicopter, and Grey removes Anna's morphine drip. She asks if she is agreeable to that, and Anna says yes.

Anna: I can't find my soul if I'm medicated. No pain no gain, right?

Grey: Well, it's not just for your father. You believe it too, right?

Anna: I know it sounds like a load of crap, but watch the ritual. You'll see.

Grey: See what?

Anna: The moment it happens.

This scene is important because until this point, viewers are left wondering whether or not Anna is conceding to her father's wishes freely. Her response indicates that she is agreeing to go through the healing ritual because she truly believes it is necessary. The shaman comes in with Anna's father. Several other Hmong people are behind him. Anna says, "I'm ready," as the screen fades to black.

After a brief scene revisiting the patient who uses pornography as pain management, the camera cuts to healing ritual. The shaman is shown waving fire over Anna's body. The doctors watch through the window quietly. Shepherd asks Grey how long she thinks it takes it find a lost soul. She simply says, "I don't know." Their faces are expressionless. The fact that they are not nonverbally showing contempt for the ritual is positive, but at the same time, there is little evidence that they are making any attempt to accept it as a form of healing.

The ritual progresses as the camera travels around the hospital. When the camera returns, Anna looks over at Grey and nonverbally indicates that her soul has returned.

The camera positions itself in a way that allows viewers to see the communication through Grey's eyes. It then switches to Anna's perspective, and we see Grey nod in "understanding". It is unclear whether she is simply understanding her message or understanding the ritual, but based on prior events, I interpret the nod to merely acknowledge that she received and understood Anna's nonverbal message.

As outlined above, this episode supports the claim that there are ideological problems with using programs like *Grey's Anatomy* as E-E interventions. E-E producers privilege some views while negating others and may be communicating more than just the intended messages.

Shepherd and Grey's interactions with the Hmong people clearly articulate the notion that Western medicine is superior to any other culture's views of what it means to be well. They scorn it, literally call it insane, deem the patient's father an unfit parent by calling social services, treat the 18-year-old patient as a child, and refuse to consider the option of sitting down with the patient's family and truly understanding what they need. Yet in the end, there is an indication of dialogue between the doctors and the family because the patient's needs are met. I argue, however, that this is an illusion of dialogue. The doctors never try to fully understand the Hmong point of view, nor do they support it. They merely collect enough information to allow the ritual to happen and tolerate it. Toleration is a step in the right direction, but it does not foster true intercultural understanding. No one was given the opportunity to explain the roots or nuances of the healing ritual. Therefore, the Hmong people's views were no less marginalized at the end than they were in the beginning, and one could posit that they are more so because there was little acknowledgement of their validity. In short, the healing ritual was allowed to

happen, but it was also ridiculed, disrespected, and not understood. The doctors are ultimately positioned as heroes, however, because they used their resources to do whatever was necessary to perform a surgery.

Further, if E-E producers argue that they can effectively teach viewers that women with HIV have a 98 percent change of giving birth to a healthy baby using a *Grey's Anatomy* episode, it must be acknowledged that other messages are having an impact. How can viewers distinguish between what is intended to be educational and what is intended to be entertaining if the educational components are masked as entertainment? What else are E-E programs such as *Grey's Anatomy* teaching? That American doctors believe Eastern views of medicine are insane, yet they endorse the use of pornography as a pain management technique? That people with highly-regarded medical degrees are incapable of understanding other points of view? That American doctors' personal lives are riddled with affairs, strained interpersonal relationships, and divorce to such an extent that that they cannot fully focus on their patients? Are these the attributes of Western medicine that producers truly want to convey?

The next section discusses the ideological issues present in the *Law & Order: SVU* episode "Strain."

Law & Order: SVU: "Strain"

The New York City Health Department announced in February 2005 that a new strain of HIV had been found in a gay man who had contracted the virus through unprotected sex while under the influence of crystal methamphetamine (Goldman, 2005). Health officials found the new form troubling because it was resistant to antiviral drugs and progressed much more quickly than normal. In October of the same year, *Law &*

Order: SVU, known for its "ripped from the headlines" content, dedicated an episode to the issue.

A heterosexual couple discovers a dead, naked man displayed in a store window. The word "killer" is written above him in silver paint. Viewers quickly learn his name is Robin Weller, and as the investigation into his death progresses, detectives find his lover, Lydon Grant, murdered in his loft. Crystal meth is strewn around the apartment, and the word "killer" is again written at the crime scene, this time in red on the victim's bed. They link the murders to Gabriel, a leader in an anti-drug, pro-condom use group for gay men called the Rainbow Warriors.

Gabriel openly admits to the murders upon his arrest, citing a motive he believes to be valid: Robin and/or his lover infected his younger brother with the "killer" strain of HIV. In order to avenge his death, he decides that it is his duty to murder those with the virus to prevent it from spreading to others. The psychiatrist observing his confession refers to his perspective as a "Messiah complex." Gabriel's attorney uses this argument in court, emphasizing that hundreds of lives could have potentially been lost if the two people he murdered had been spared. She also references actions taken by New York City during a past tuberculosis epidemic. Those with TB who would not take prescribed medicine were quarantined. Laws have since been passed banning this practice, which left Gabriel no choice but to "take matters in his own hands." The prosecutor argues, in contrast, that the people who were infected, including his brother, chose to use drugs and have unprotected sex. Gabriel therefore did not have grounds to commit murder and should suffer the consequences of his actions. The jury agrees and finds him guilty on both counts of murder. Robin's father surprises everyone at the sentencing, however, by

pleading with the judge to not punish Gabriel to the fullest extent. His statement could lead viewers to believe he agrees that he was at least somewhat justified in killing his son. He closes by blaming Robin's addiction to meth for his transformation into someone he no longer knew.

This episode is worthy of critique because it quite disturbingly characterizes gay men who use drugs as murderers, blames them virtually completely for the advance of a new "killer" strain of HIV that is resistant to anti-viral drugs, and indirectly alludes to the idea that it is acceptable to slaughter individuals infected with HIV to prevent them from killing others by transmitting it through intercourse. There is a dehumanizing element to the episode, which, as history has shown, can be the first step to justifying mass violence against a particular population.

These themes are evident as one looks more deeply at details present in the program. The episode opens with a white, heterosexual couple kissing on a dark street in front of several closed shops. The woman becomes distracted by a pair of shoes in a store window. The man she is with tries to recapture her attention and promises, "I'll buy them for you tomorrow." She emphatically replies, "You *have* to get here when the store opens." She notices Robin's body naked in the window shortly after that comment passes her lips. Suddenly her childish, materialistic mentality is gone, and she becomes focused on the body. This scene serves as an appropriate entrance because it establishes the status quo. Materialism, consumerism, and heterosexuality are norms that are often celebrated in our culture. This lies in direct contrast to drug use and homosexuality. Both are considered deviant behaviors by large portions of the population and are set up as such in the program.

As law enforcement professionals investigate the crime scene, they note that Robin was forced to strip down, bound with wire, shot at point blank range, and then put on display in a store window. Dr. Huang, the staff psychiatrist, says everything in the store window display was "intentional and meaningful." The shoes in the window pointing toward Robin, his nakedness, and the word killer above him lead the investigators to say the crime was "staged like a sick play" and "theatrical." Gay men are often connected with theatre, so this is a possible play on an old stereotype.

More importantly, the act of being forced to strip, bound with wire, and shot point blank is reminiscent of American responses to terrorism. Being forced to remove one's clothing is an ultimate act of submission—it is common in many forms of domination, including rape, acts of torture, and genocide (i.e the Holocaust, the recent events in Darfur, and the less recent conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda). I am reminded specifically of photos taken at Abu Ghraib in Iraq depicting American soldiers forcing Iraqis to remove their clothing and form a pyramid. It is a humiliating, dehumanizing act, but in the Iraqi case, it was celebrated by some in America because terrorists are often made to appear subhuman through discourse. Making them appear less human opens the door to humiliation, brutality, and violence against them.

The fact that Gabriel tortured and killed Robin in a similar way suggests that he has the same social status as a terrorist. Indeed the word terrorist comes up in the trial when the defense attorney draws a comparison between Lydon and Robin and Osama bin Laden. She creates a scenario of bin Laden holding a dirty bomb and then asks the jury members if they would shoot him "to save the city" if given the opportunity. This represents two troubling parallels—a disease is equated to a dirty bomb, and an HIV-

positive drug user is equated to the world's most wanted terrorist leader. Although one could argue that the parallel is justified because diseases have been used in warfare, it is unfortunate because the LGBT community has long fought the stereotype that HIV/AIDS is a "gay" disease. According to recent research outlined below, blaming gay meth users for the new strain is both misguided and misinformed.

Researchers, educators, and public health officials have long been concerned about the rate at which crystal meth use is increasing among men who have sex with men (MSM), but there was little research that specifically addressed meth use by HIV-positive MSM until 2003. A study of 90 HIV-positive MSM found that the frequency of use and the amount of the drug used varies greatly among HIV-positive MSM (Semple, Patterson, and Grant, 2003). They assigned participants to two categories: binge users and non-binge users. Binge users, which constituted 41 percent of their sample, used the drug an average of 6 days (responses ranged between 2 and 33 days) and consumed it up to 22 times per day during that time (the mean was slightly more than 6 times per day). These users were also "more likely than nonbinge users to start using meth…to get more energy, to feel more attractive, to enhance sexual pleasure, and to feel more self-confident" (p. 140). Despite being more likely to report physical, mental, social, financial, and legal problems associated with the drug, they were significantly more likely to perceive the sexual consequences of the drug positively and engage in more unprotected, anonymous sex acts with HIV-negative/unknown serostatus partners. Although the sample size is small, this pilot study is significant because it illuminates behaviors the issue *Law & Order: SVU* producers are targeting and supports the opinion that these behaviors pose a major public health concern.

Not all researchers have been quick to solely place the blame on meth, however. Bolding, Hart, Sherr, and Elford (2006) found that MSM who use crystal meth are more likely to be HIV-positive and engage in high-risk sexual behavior; but the authors emphasize that one cannot, even in the context of other studies done, establish a causal relationship between meth use and high risk behaviors. They argue, "It may be that men who engage in high-risk sex also use crystal meth, rather than crystal meth itself leading to high-risk sex" (p. 1622).

Grov, Parsons, and Bimbi (2008) also look at the issue differently. They found that slightly more than 10 percent of a sample of more than 700 MSM had recently used meth and close to 30 percent had engaged in unprotected sex. Within that 30 percent, the use of meth was *not* a factor more than 80 percent of the time. These statistics suggest that meth is not the primary reason why HIV is being transmitted through unprotected sex. The authors state that focusing on meth could potentially hurt, rather than help efforts to slow the spread of the disease. "Pigeonholing meth not only excludes (and to some extent forgives) nonmethamphetamine using men who engage in UAI [unprotected anal intercourse] but may also overlook the broader political, social, and psychological forces continuing to drive new HIV transmissions among sexual minorities" (p. 50).

This argument is key to this critique because it suggests that the producers' approach to the issue could be doing more harm than good. By advancing the idea that gay meth users are public enemy number one, other, more critical issues are ignored. Is suggesting these individuals are terrorists not adding fuel to the broader political, social and psychological forces by intersecting with existing homophobic discourses? Coupled with the way in which Robin was killed, these parallels are dangerous. Dehumanizing

treatment and suggestions that HIV-positive drug users are major public health threats create a scenario in which violence against an entire community is justified. Threats to public health can certainly be classified as a reason to control, if not oppress, a particular population. Considering that the LGBT community is already oppressed, these effects could be even worse.

There are other less serious stereotypes used during the program worth mentioning. When investigators searched Robin's apartment, they look at photos on his computer. The comment, "The victim liked to party," was made. This was followed up by, "South Beach, Palm Springs, P-town [Provincetown]—all gay hot spots." This of course suggests a great number of gay men like to party, perhaps irresponsibly if they were in the company of a meth user like Robin. Perpetuating this stereotype is unfair to those who do not fall into this category but are included by popular opinion solely because they are gay. Gabriel's character, in contrast to those who fit the party stereotype, is everything someone who is intimidated by gay men could want. He is clean, polite, could pass for straight. These "likable" characteristics add support for the idea that viewers are supposed to see him as someone who was trying to "do the right thing" by killing men who were spreading disease.

Gabriel perpetuates stereotypes in negative ways as well, however. There are two instances when he indicates he thinks he is being oppressed when in fact he deserves the treatment he was being given, at least under current law. When accused of hacking into the New York Health Department's system to get names of HIV-positive gay men while he was working there as a janitor, he denies it and says he was checking his email.

"Typical. Have a problem? Blame it on the faggot janitor," he says. And when he is arrested for murder at a protest he scoffs, "What are the charges? Loitering while gay?"

These sections of the script are problematic because most people would agree that stereotypes, while largely inaccurate, are rooted in some form of truth. There are certainly times when gay men are discriminated against, but making light of that in a situation in which one is lying hurts the credibility of people who are trying to fight the stereotypes. By lying, Gabriel is negating some of the progress the gay community has made.

Although these undertones are present, the program takes steps to reiterate violence against gay men is not acceptable. The investigators arrest a teenager associated with the Manhattan Killer Squad (MKS), who, according to the episode, are white suburban teenagers who pose as gay men, lure men who are high out of circuit parties, beat them up, confiscate whatever drugs they have on them, and then sell the drugs to other gay dealers. They take him in for questioning thinking he is Robin's murderer, but he testifies, "You think I whacked those fags? I rip 'em off – that's it!" When asked why he targets gay men, he replies, "They're easy marks. They don't call the cops when they get jumped – don't want people to know about their freaky sex lives and their meth." They let him go after they realize "killer" refers to the strain of HIV Robin and his lover Lydon both carried, not the Manhattan Killer Squad, but not until this incredibly offensive point of view gets air time (although one individual does refer to them as savages).

At this point in the episode, the E-E element of the program appears to kick into high gear. The main characters are brainstorming in light of the new information about

the two men's HIV status. They speculate that the murderer might be a former partner or a vigilante. The latter proves to be correct, but during the conversation, the team shares a dialogue presumably designed to inform viewers about this public health issue.

Fin: The whole country's swimming in crank – why just kill gay men?

Dr. Huang: Because after years of keeping HIV in check, meth is causing an increase in new infections, especially among gay men in the club scene. They call it PNP – party 'n play.

Benson: When you're tweaking on meth, you can have sex for hours; but you're so high you're not likely to use a condom.

Cragen: And much more likely to spread HIV.

Dr. Huang: The killer's desperate and wants people to wake up to the danger.

This exchange enlightens viewers to this new public "crisis." They do not offer percentages or quantify the problem in any way, nor do they ever utter the words such as, "Gay meth users are the number one reason why this is a public threat." But they allude to it many times during the program. In short, nothing in the above exchange is false (though some might disagree with the opinion that HIV has been "in check" for many years), but it does omit important information included in the research outlined above. So although the above information is factual, omitting the fact that meth is only a small part of the situation leads viewers to believe that gay meth users are major culprits and are therefore an enormous health risk that must be stopped.

Those views manifest in Gabriel. He felt he did not have a choice when he learned Robin had infected his brother and several others with HIV. He had to protect the world from these two irresponsible individuals at all costs. His work with the

Rainbow Army was not successful enough—as he said on the stand at the trial, "I couldn't even save my own brother." He had to take matters into his own hands, and, in his words, "By stopping two lives…saved thousands more." He was "killing for the cause."

Producers do allow the other side to be heard, however, when the prosecuting attorney wins with the argument that there is an element of personal responsibility present in the situation. She asks Gabriel if he would have killed his brother if it had been him who was infecting others, and he could not answer the question. The prosecutor also compares Robin to the CEO of a tobacco company—is it okay to kill an individual who is providing products that kill thousands each year when it is individuals themselves who choose to smoke? The answer is of course no, at least in our culture. Then why is it okay to kill the dealer when it was his brother who chose to start using meth?

In this way, Gabriel "Played God - decided who lives and who dies" in Fin's words. This leads me to look more closely at the Christian undertones present in the episode. Perhaps in addition to the new "strain" of HIV the show informs us about, there are illustrations of the "strained" relationship between LGBT individuals and Christians. During the part of the show when Gabriel confesses the murder, Dr. Huang explains that having a "Messiah complex" means, "He believes he can see things no one else sees—like a prophet." He is allegedly foreseeing the destruction the new strain can cause and therefore feels called to stop it. The fact that his namesake is an archangel often sent as a messenger from God has ideological consequences in the sense that one may interpret

Gabriel's actions as sanctioned by God, regardless of whether or not this was the motivation behind the selection of his name in the script.

The courtroom is also reminiscent of a church. The wooden seats resemble pews and stained glass windows can be seen in the background. Further, during the arraignment, the judge seems intrigued by the defense attorney's argument that Gabriel was essentially killing for the public good and chooses to allow her to proceed with her strategy. The "church-like" atmosphere and the fact that the judge has agreed to hear arguments that the murders were justified give her "god-like" power.

There also seems to be a subplot that focuses on parents of LGBT individuals. These sections are not overtly Christian in nature as the others are, but because many Christians believe homosexuality is sinful, and the parents featured in the episode are not supportive of their sons' lifestyles, it could be considered a message to conservative (largely Conservative Christian) parents. During the investigation Fin and Benson find a stamp on Robin's hand from a club. When they follow the lead to the club, Fin notices his son's name (Ken Randall) on the guest list. He was not aware that his son was gay and immediately goes to his apartment to confront him. There they share the first of several awkward moments related to Randall's sexual orientation. Fin struggles with coming to terms with it, despite the fact that his son goes undercover as a participant in the Rainbow Army and obtains the evidence needed to incriminate Gabriel. Producers seem to juxtapose this relationship with the relationship between Robin and his father. The two fathers converse privately in the last scene (after Mr. Weller asks the judge to go easy on Gabriel at the sentencing). Mr. Weller confides that he told Robin he wished he were dead the night he revealed he was gay, and now he wishes he had a second chance.

The show closes with Fin making a call on his cell phone. Viewers are led to believe he is calling Ken, though we are not able to hear any of the conversation.

There is also a conversation between Ken and another participant in the Rainbow Army that addresses this issue. He asks Ken if his parents will be okay with him getting arrested for the cause before allowing him to come on board. He says his parents would be proud of him. He is pleased and mentions that some parents are okay with their kids being gay, but they are not okay with their lifestyles being publicized in the newspaper because they might have to answer to their neighbors. He accuses them of being more worried about what the neighbors think than about their own children, which unfortunately in many cases might be true. It seems that each of these examples is intended to serve as messages to parents to support their children, regardless of their sexual orientation. I do not personally disagree with these messages, so this is less of a critique of the message and more of an example of additional ideology being embedded in the program. It also may be producers' way of balancing the idea that individuals who are HIV-positive, gay, and use meth are public threats.

My final comment is associated with the way Ken interprets the Rainbow Army's work and how that relates to current research. When asked about the organization, Ken, a HIV-negative, non-meth user, says he respects what they do. This is consistent with Nanin, Parsons, Bimbi, Grov, and Brown (2006) who said anti-meth campaigns were best received by HIV-negative men who did not currently use meth and not as well received by HIV-positive men or current meth users. So it seems that the producers are in tune with research, but instead of trying to improve upon other options, they present the option

of murder. Perhaps this is merely exploitation and sensationalism for ratings sake, but regardless of the motivation, it walks a precarious line.

This critique demonstrates that the messages present in the episode have great potential to alert viewers to the danger gay meth users pose to society as a whole and persuade them that they should be stopped by all means necessary. Although it is difficult to demonstrate causal relationships between media viewing and behavior, producers must be more aware of the consequences their plotlines can have (and do) have on viewers ideological perspectives. The way this issue is presented in the episode is dangerous and misinformed because it overinflates one part of the problem and in doing so, downplays other, potentially more serious flaws in our nation's social system. In de Castro Buffington's own words, "Viewers remember key health information incorporated into storylines," and "This increased knowledge can lead to healthier personal behavior, heighten their awareness of global health issues, and even impact policy" (Hollywood, Health, & Society, 2010, para. 7). If episodes like "Strain" have the potential to shape policy, it is critical that we take a serious look at what these programs are really "teaching".

As mentioned in the first chapter, advocates of E-E firmly believe that it has the ability to transcend differences, promote peace, and reduce oppression (Singhal & Rogers, 2004). But I maintain that if programs like *Grey's Anatomy* and *Law & Order: SVU* continue to be embedded with questionable and potentially dangerous ideology, E-E could be more likely to perpetuate oppression than minimize it. It is therefore imperative that E-E producers take the time to better understand the (un)intended consequences their

interventions can have on viewers rather than incorporating components of factual material and then stretching it for dramatic effect.

Chapter 4

Can This Strategy Be Saved?

All television is educational. The question is, what does it teach?

Nicholas Johnson
Former FCC Commissioner
(as cited in Hendershot, 1998)

This famous quote by Johnson succinctly outlines the dilemma before us. Television is not going anywhere. Television is always embedded with ideology. Anyone who produces a mediated program will always have the power to decide what viewers see and hear. Media always has been, and likely always will be, a double-edged sword. It has the power reflect, reify, and influence societal values, though media effects are often difficult to quantify.

So what do these assertions mean for Entertainment-Education? Given the first three chapters, one might be justified in thinking I believe there is no hope to salvaging this theoretically-flawed, manipulative strategy. On the contrary, I would not have chosen this topic if I held a hopeless view. I will close with a discussion of what I have taken away from my research and conclusions about where I believe E-E should go from here.

The first thing we must do if we buy into the idea that E-E is an effective way to enact social change is to remove the phrase, "It's only entertainment," from our collective vocabulary. Regardless of intent—well-meaning or otherwise—all television programs socialize us on some level. The intensity with which viewers are impacted of course varies, but television is never free of an "educational" message. Whether one is watching *Law & Order: SVU* or *Everybody Loves Raymond*, he or she learns something. While

watching *SVU*, we might learn that there is a new strain of HIV in the world. And even though producers of the *Everybody Loves Raymond* probably do not intend to be educational, we might "learn" how an ordinary suburban family copes with challenges that result from marriage, children, and meddling in-laws. Whether viewers choose to adopt those strategies and tactics is up to each of them individually; but from a Burkean perspective, everything we encounter becomes part of the lens through which we see the world. Burke calls these lenses our "terministic screens" (Burke, 1989, p. 115). To illustrate his point, he uses the metaphor of a photograph printed differently (color, black and white, and sepia, for example). The image captured by the photograph is the same (i.e. it contains the same "facts"), but the way we see the photo is different. In Burke's view, all of us see the world through different terministic screens.

Hollywood, Health, & Society agrees that we absorb information from television programs and therefore created a newsletter entitled "Real to Reel" (The Norman Lear Center, 2010). The quarterly publication offers factual information intended to provide fodder for script writers. We learn from television anyway, they reason. Why not make the information factual? That sounds great in theory, but what happens when "facts" are distorted, as they are in the *Law & Order: SVU* episode discussed in the previous chapter? The drama was rooted in fact (i.e. taken from a news story), but it was clearly spun in a particular way for dramatic effect, thus placing more blame on one particular population than they should be required to accept. Therefore, using programs that require high ratings to survive on commercial television seems counterintuitive. If drama and sensationalism are necessary to make the programs interesting enough to watch, can the "facts" ever be communicated without blatant bias? Can several sides of an issue be

examined if producers are worried about offending advertisers? Consider Viacom's involvement in *Get Schooled.* Because Viacom answers to its shareholders, its main focus must always be its bottom line. As I have demonstrated, this creates a conflict of interest.

The "facts" present in E-E interventions are also always connected to existing ideas and discourses about the subject matter at hand. Despite producers' best efforts to target audiences with carefully crafted messages, viewers and listeners never consume programs in a vacuum. As I have mentioned several times throughout this project, if we are not supposed to know when the messages are intended to entertain and when they are intended to educate, anything could potentially be viewed as educational. Using that logic, producers cannot pick and choose what is merely "entertainment" and what is Entertainment-Education. Despite research that supports the idea that narrative suppresses critical thinking skills (and my earlier assertion that E-E fundamentally opposes critical pedagogy), the majority of adults are capable of thinking for themselves. Particular psychological strategies and power structures present in society encourage us to forget that sometimes, but there is hope that we can still actively pick and choose what we incorporate into our lives.

Wait, did I just contradict myself? If we are thinking human beings, then we should be able to distinguish fact from fiction. After all, very few of us go on violent rampages after watching a violent film or playing a violent video game. No, because my arguments about neoliberal power structures invading public spaces are still valid. We should not have to continuously fight to maintain independence from an endless flood of messages encouraging us to build our lives around individualism, ethnocentrism,

materialism, consumption, violence, sex, emphasis on celebrity, and the many other forms of artificially-produced culture that are fed to us on a daily basis by many forms of media produced by transnational media conglomerates. We are selling our souls to the highest bidder. E-E is merely a bandage to cover up larger systemic issues.

E-E, in the case of *Get Schooled*, is a bandage on the core issue that we no longer collectively value education. We value the job training education provides so we can compete in a cut-throat corporate job market. E-E, in the case of the *Law & Order: SVU* episode "Witness," is a bandage over the core issue that we feel the need to have the latest cell phone or the fastest computer available—last year's model is embarrassing. Our insatiable hunger for electronics, combined with corporate America's focus on cutting costs at all costs, and the fact that someone can always be found to do someone else's dirty work for the right price, leads to the exploitation of and violence against African women. Why must the "job" of exposing these injustices go to Neal Baer? Because news organizations are often too busy talking about Brangelina. Am I blaming news media? No—it is a cycle. We vote with our time and attention. They give us more of what we want. We are distracted from tragic human rights issues by the hot celeb of the week, Facebook, our iPods, and our favorite television characters. And when our favorite television characters tell us that 98 percent of women with HIV can deliver a healthy baby with proper treatment, we feel good because television taught us something positive that we can tell our teenage friend who contracted HIV from her boyfriend. Who says you can't believe what you see on TV? Point megamedia. But what about the millions of other programs that celebrate sex without consequences? Do those not contribute to the creation of the oversexed culture adolescents must navigate as they grow

into adulthood? A few after school specials about practicing "safe sex" cannot effectively combat the culture machine.

How does this relate to the use of E-E in developing countries? Are producers not empowering women by helping them take control of their fertility, expand their gender roles, and fight back against domestic violence? Perhaps. But Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren, and Peters (2005) offer this perspective:

> The "democratizing" imperatives of private enterprise, wage labor, free trade, and other fundamental axes for the new capitalist world system ushered in by the third industrial revolution of computer technology have shrouded individuals in a web of promotional logic patterned by the conquering dynamism of Eurocentrism. Colonization has gone transnational and corporatist (Miyoshi, 1993). As Jacques Attali (1991; 120) warns, "From Santiago to Beijing, from Johannesburg to Moscow, all economic systems will worship at the altar of the market. People will sacrifice gods for profit (p. 118).

In other words, imposing Western ideals on developing countries opens markets. Empowered women who have fewer children and a sense that they now perform roles previously considered to be masculine can work, make money, and become consumers with larger pocket books. Yes, their standard of living can increase in the process, but the cost of rising from the chains of poverty can be a life within the chains of incessant consumerism. Chains is admittedly a harsh word for a standard of living that appears to provide anything one wants if his or her credit cards can pay for it; but as demonstrated in first chapter, consequences can be devastating to our familial relationships, our health, our education systems, and our overall autonomy. There seems to be an inverse relationship between the rise of individualism and the decrease of autonomy. Consumers who consciously and unconsciously rely on material goods to find happiness live in a state of artificial happiness. A life of domestic violence and other forms of oppression is certainly not happy either, but because unsuspecting native people are targeted with E-E

messages that promote Western lifestyles, often without concern for what they really need to improve their situations, it seems that we are putting citizens of developing nations between a rock and a hard place. I support Dutta's (2007) call for a more culture-centered approach to communicating social messages. Fostering dialogue that illuminates social problems and, when possible, encourages citizens to work together to find their own solutions would be a much better way to empower people in developing nations than telling teenagers to wear magic hoods.

So can E-E ever be used in a "correct" way? The concept has been used for decades, perhaps even centuries outside of is mediated form. But only recently has Miguel Sabido dubbed it "Entertainment-Education." And only recently has it been used in a world in which six corporations produce the vast majority of the information and entertainment we consume on a daily basis and celebrity drama dominates 24-hour news cycles. Our concept of what is "informational," what is "educational," and what is "entertaining" is shifting, making E-E an elusive concept to pin down outside of Sabido's definition.

If it is indeed used as a way to communicate public information, the factors I have been discussing: agency/the political economy of media, critical pedagogy, cultural sensitivity, neoliberalism, and advancement of incessantly consumer-driven ideologies must be taken into consideration and continuously critiqued from a critical-cultural perspective. Residual effects also need to be examined, and a true dialogic relationship between producers and their audiences must be formed.

Education, to me, is about learning many different perspectives, discussing the benefits and drawbacks of each, and thinking critically about their implications. E-E

producers have said that this occurs in some cases, but as I have highlighted, their actions do not support the rhetoric. They often attempt to enact social change in specific ways using specific ideology, and in doing so, choose not to offer multiple perspectives. Instead of fostering counterargument and dialogue, the narratives suppress it. This is inherently problematic.

Further, there is always extra baggage associated with the messages they are communicating, so it is imperative that they think about the ways audiences interpret these messages in a more complex way. It is of course impossible for any mediated message to be free of ideology, but an honest look at what mediated programs, especially those that claim to be educational, are *really* teaching is a step in the right direction.

It is unrealistic to try to solve the problems I have tried to lay out in a roughly 100-page thesis. While putting this together has been a significant experience in my life, it realistically has as much power to solve problems as a thimble would have to remove water from a sinking ship. It is possible that portions of it and work that I complete in the future can become more widely known, provided that others believe the way I have combined my ideas with well-regarded critical scholars is worthy of publication. I, of course, acknowledge that this is merely my present perspective, and it offers only a few ways of looking at E-E. But regardless of its limited scope, it is my hope that anyone who reads this volume will be more conscious of ideology embedded in mediated messages and the ways our endless pursuit of ratings, profit, and individual gain have led to a degradation of public space and a largely disengaged populous. Entertainment-Education is not the answer. I do not claim to have it, but I firmly believe that finding ways to educate people about the corporate and governmental structures that control our

flow of information and entertainment are key to figuring out how to re-engage citizens and work to solve social issues such as public education. But you probably will not hear the doctors talk about that during an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* any time soon.

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